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ABSTRACT

The research reported here seeks to explain communication failure between Whites and Aboriginals in Australia, based on an examination of fundamental concepts underlying the world view of each group. The research arose from the observation that in Aboriginal-White encounters, each group had different expectations of and conclusions about the same events, often leading to misunderstanding and resentment. The study focuses on one such encounter occurring in 1968, during a change in government policy toward Aboriginal self-determination. The first eight chapters seek to explain the problems by stages: recognition by Aborigines and Whites of a cross-cultural communication problem; analysis of the communication in the encounters; comparison of four researchers' accounts of Aboriginal sacred rites; consideration of Aboriginal concepts of time and space; cross-cultural contrast in degrees of abstraction (Piagetian theory); description of the 1968 encounter; examination of the Aborigines' language, Pitjantjatjara; examination of the Aborigines' responses to a series of questions to shed light on degree of abstraction in Aboriginal thinking; and contrast of Aboriginal and White concepts of process. The three subsequent chapters summarize and synthesize the contrasts in abstraction and process, draw theoretical implications, and look at practical implications for Aboriginal self-determination and self-management. A 77-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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THE ABORIGINAL–WHITE ENCOUNTER

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THE ABORIGINAL–WHITE ENCOUNTER

TOWARDS BETTER COMMUNICATION

Margaret S. Bain

Australian Aborigines and Islanders Branch
Summer Institute of Linguistics
Darwin

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Series Foreword

SIL-AAIB Occasional Papers No. 2 is a departure from our usual linguistic and vernacular publications, but we believe Margaret Bain's work deserves reading by a wide audience, including linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, and all who work closely with Aboriginal people. It is our hope that Bain's insights and analysis will prompt further research by others in these fields.

The author has over the past two years shared from her research and her thinking with SIL field linguists. Though they have queried some of her conclusions in the area of language, there has been agreement that she is 'on to something' in her search for the underlying causes of continued miscommunication between Aborigines and whites.

Bain's work represents years of close interaction with Aboriginal people and years of study, both formal and informal, in several disciplines. The result bears the mark of her enquiring mind and her practical concerns.

Since the book draws from several disciplines, the reader may find some sections unfamiliar territory. But press on to chapter 11; that chapter must be read before a final evaluation of the author's work is made.

Susanne Hargrave
Series Editor

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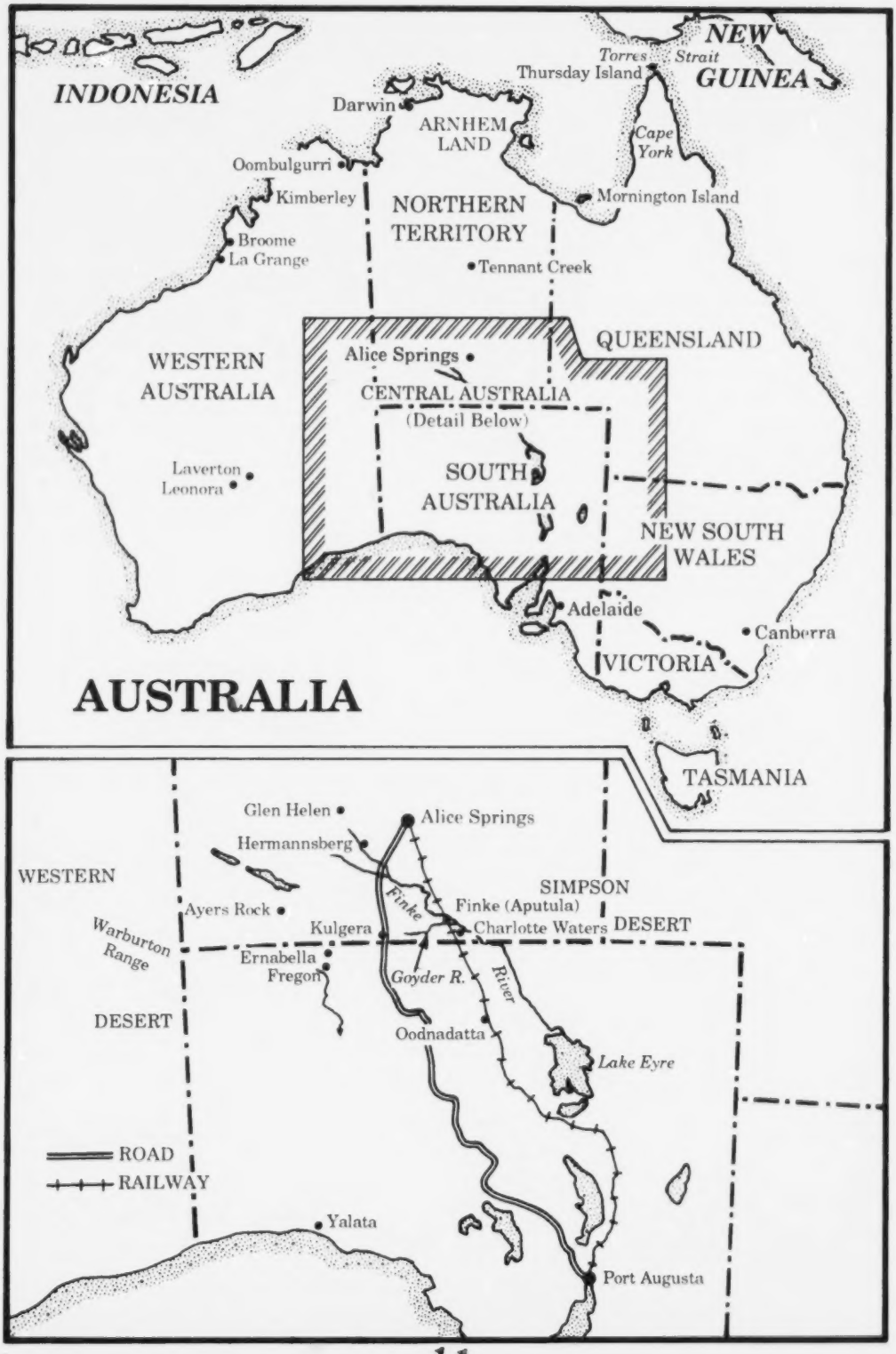
Aputula (Finke), Northern Territory

Photo by Alison Vines who served the Aputula community as flying doctor, during 1973-75.

To my parents
Douglas and Margaret Bain
who made it possible for me to undertake the work

And to my sister
Dorothy Schwieger
without whose tireless support the writing would never have been finished


INDONESIA
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NORTHERN TERRITORY
Mornington Island
Broome
La Grange
Tennant Creek
QUEENSLAND
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Alice Springs
CENTRAL AUSTRALIA
(Detail Below)
Laverton
Leonora
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
NEW SOUTH WALES
Adelaide
Canberra
VICTORIA
AUSTRALIA
TASMANIA
Glen Helen
Alice Springs
Hermannsberg
WESTERN
SIMPSON
Finke
Ayers Rock
Finke (Aputula)
Kulgera
Charlotte Waters
DESERT
Warburton Range
Ernabella
Fregon
Goyder R.
River
DESERT
Oodnadatta
Lake Eyre
ROAD
RAILWAY
Yalata
Port Augusta

Foreword

Among the thinkers and writers about Australian Aboriginal society there seldom appears one who comes to grips with beliefs and thought. Durkheim tried to do so in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* but without himself seeing or talking to an Aborigine and with only rudimentary information. The same could be said of Lévi-Strauss. Others such as A. P. Elkin, T. G. H. Strehlow, W. E. H. Stanner, R. M. Berndt and K. Maddock all studied Aboriginal communities as well as reading what others had said, and all made their own contribution to our understanding. Now Margaret Bain, an almost unknown writer but one who has lived with Aborigines for many years, has dared to enter this difficult and controversial field. She has not only analysed, compared and criticised the work of her predecessors, but has also expressed her own original conclusions derived from patient listening to Aborigines.

Ever since I first began to exchange ideas with Margaret Bain, I realised I was in the presence of a profound and original thinker, one who could illuminate many problems in the relationship between Aboriginal and European Australians. She has attempted in this book to explain why these relationships are often strained and why discussions between the two sides often end in fruitless misunderstandings. To arrive at her explanation she looked carefully at Aboriginal ritual, noting significant differences in Aboriginal and western world views and conceptual systems. She then examined and compared the thought processes of the two societies. In this analysis the writings of psychologists, particularly that of Jean Piaget and of Piagetian scholars, proved helpful. These workers have shown that basic thought processes are the same cross-culturally and Bain's work supports such a view. Nevertheless, while finding much in common between Aboriginal and western concepts, she found also a significant difference in the preferred use made of abstraction. This difference lies at the root of much misunderstanding.

Margaret Bain began her work with Aborigines as a Presbyterian missionary at Mornington Island in North Queensland, then at Ernabella in the Western Desert. Finally, at Finke, a railway siding lying between the Western and Simpson Deserts, where Aranda as well as Pitjantjatjara speakers gathered, she became community adviser, loved and trusted by the community. Margaret became a competent speaker of Pitjantjatjara. Being able to communicate freely with people who find English difficult has been an invaluable asset in her relationship with the local Aborigines and in unravelling the complexity of their beliefs and thought processes.

In 1974 I stayed with Margaret at Finke for some days and was able to observe her at work. She treated Aborigines in a frank and matter-of-fact way, with no hint of condescension, but rather as if they might have been members of her own family. They brought to her many problems, some of which she was able to solve promptly and efficiently. Where a proposal was impracticable, she explained patiently why this was so. It was in her difficulty in conveying this kind of information that she realised how different were Aboriginal concepts from our own. This realisation, made some years before I first met her, finally

brought her to Monash University to study anthropology. After completing a qualifying course in anthropology (her previous degree had been in science), she registered for an MA and I had the good fortune to become her supervisor. My own study of the Western Desert Aborigines certainly benefited from her much longer and wider experience. This book is an updated and reworked version of her MA thesis. To write it, she has spent years reading the relevant literature and forming a synthesis of the ideas she gained from the writing of others together with her own observations of the Aboriginal people whom she knew so well.

Those whose task is to communicate with Aboriginal people will derive enormous benefit from reading this book. Some parts present complex new ideas and require maximum concentration to apprehend, concentration well repaid by greater understanding.

Isobel White

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Preface

Most of the ideas and data in this book were presented originally for a Master of Arts degree from the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Monash University. That degree was conferred in 1979. Since that time I have substantially rewritten sections of the work, although without changing the original thrust and without altering the major findings.

The book seeks to explain a practical problem that concerns traditional Aborigines and whites, specifically, communication failures of the Aboriginal-white encounter. Difficulties of this kind involve what people think, and, within that field, my particular interest is the fundamental concepts underlying world view. A search of the literature has shown that there is little of assistance on this topic, but a few basic Aboriginal concepts are generally recognised. These ideas agree with my own observations. I have been able, therefore, to start from a small but empirically verified conceptual base and, by examining Aboriginal religious practice, to proceed from the known to the unknown, deriving logically a number of additional concepts. My initial training in science (chemistry) has no doubt influenced my choice of such a procedure but, in any case, I must show the reader how I reached my conclusions in order to substantiate them. Theory and empirical confirmation alternate in the text, each step consolidating a base for another advance in understanding, and lead eventually to an explanation of the problem.

I acknowledge with gratitude my debt to Isobel White for her assistance as supervisor during postgraduate studies in anthropology at Monash University and for her never-flagging, generous help over the years in reading and commenting on drafts of the text. Special thanks are due also to Gavin Seagrim for assisting me to a deeper understanding of Piagetian theory, for reading several drafts of this work, and for his detailed comment, both in respect of the style of writing and of the content. Pierre Dasen also discussed the manuscript from the psychologist's perspective and provided detailed comment while Paul Eckert, linguist, assessed most of the chapter on the Pitjantjatjara language. Noel Wallace made available empirical data that is valuable in the account of Aboriginal religion while Alison Vines, Hilton Deakin and Helen Gordon all commented on early drafts. George Silberbauer first encouraged me to undertake anthropological studies and for a short time, after Isobel White moved to Canberra, supervised my postgraduate work. In addition, this attempt in understanding Aboriginal thought has depended heavily on many discussions, the logical and sometimes perceptive pursuit of a tenuous idea, undertaken week by week over a number of years with my sister, Dorothy Schwieger. Although not trained in anthropology but in science, she listened and listened again and, in addition to my supervisors, challenged the flashes of insight (or, as some proved, flights of fancy!) and the logical progression of the thesis at every step. That help was invaluable. More recently Penelope Truscott has given most generously and cheerfully of her time commenting on and assisting in preparation of the final draft. In that final preparation also, perceptive and detailed comment from my editor, Susanne Hargrave, who has been ever

mindful of the reader, has helped to bring greater clarity to the writing. To all these I record my indebtedness and extend grateful thanks.

Lastly, the Aborigines at Aputula helped me above all. In sharing events of the day and in talking, they gave their community adviser an experience of Aboriginal thought and practice. For all that they taught me, for the years of working together, for permission to undertake the writing, I offer them my thanks.

Notwithstanding all the help so freely and generously given, the ideas presented here are my responsibility alone.

Introduction

In the late 1960s the encounter between traditional Aborigines and white Australians underwent a massive change.

Prior to that time paternalism characterised government and most mission policies alike, but by 1968 whites were beginning to consult with Aborigines and to try seriously to hear what they had to say. Arising from these consultations ever increasingly, all over Australia, Aborigines were being encouraged to take an active part in determining their own future. The great push for Aboriginal community development was on the move.

But the listening proved more difficult than expected. As the months and first few years went by, despite some progress many misunderstandings occurred. For example, in Central Australia as elsewhere, traditional Aborigines and whites came away from meetings with very different ideas about what had been agreed. Difficulties arose again as programmes jointly planned were put into effect. Clearly, traditional people and whites had different expectations of the same events and various explanations were given for the difference. Whites attributed problems rather vaguely to traditional Aboriginal custom or social practice, to Aboriginal unreliability or to lack of knowledge, and they sought to overcome the difficulties through more meetings, more listening, more education, and by giving more authority into Aboriginal hands. For their part many Aborigines held that whites were insincere, unreliable, greedy, and that they deliberately withheld information.

One place in Central Australia where such an encounter occurred was at Aputula, or Finke as the white people named it, where I was involved in implementing the new policies from the start. I had already worked for ten years with Aboriginal people, three in North Queensland followed by seven in Central Australia. During these seven years I was stationed at the remote Ernabella Mission, now the Pukatja community, and from there, once a month, visited the traditional but fringe-dwelling Aborigines at Aputula. The time came in 1968 when, at their request, I went to live with them as adviser and community worker. I already spoke the language, for all the Aputula people spoke either Pitjantjatjara, the language spoken at the mission, or a closely related dialect. Arriving before the changes in policy had begun to take effect, I enjoyed a close working and friendly association with these people for the next seven years, broken only by two intensive years of undergraduate training in anthropology at Monash University.

In the role of community adviser I was ideally placed to see the interplay between Aborigines and whites as the encounter occurred and was often involved myself. One thing that I attempted to do was to assist Aborigines to understand whites and their mode of working so that they could make informed decisions and exercise choice effectively. Again, communication was harder than anticipated. Somehow, and in critical respects, we were not fully in conversation. We progressed so far then something went wrong and contact was diminished or lost. Current explanations of Aboriginal behaviour and the western response were no longer satisfactory to me, and difficulties noticed down the years were brought into sharper focus and revealed in a new light. In other words, I found in

practice that the explanations offered were too superficial; they dealt largely with surface phenomena and not with causes. What was happening was that at Aputula, and in traditional Australia generally, Aborigines were working to determine their own future, to exercise the choices now open to them and to take up new, non-traditional areas of work. At the same time whites were working with them to promote these goals. Consequently the encounter between them occurred at a depth previously unknown, at a depth not experienced in the days when whites made all the decisions. The changed circumstances forced us to attempt communication as we had not attempted it before. As a result Aborigines were challenged in new ways by white cultural and social perspectives and whites were challenged by Aboriginal ones. In saying this, however, we have only raised deeper questions. What was the nature of that encounter between Aborigines and whites? Why did we have such different ideas about what was happening? Why respond so differently to events in which we both played our part? This book seeks to answer those questions. At the same time it is, in the main, one person's record and interpretation of those first years of the deeper encounter at Aputula.

No doubt, under pressure from white culture, the people of whom I write have altered some of their views and practices, but from further work in other parts of Australia and from recent information I am convinced that the original Aboriginal perspective is still active, that western explanations and associated policies are inadequate, and that what I observed is still highly relevant, not only in Central Australia but in the north as well. This, then, is essentially a practical document, aimed at a specific problem identified in experience. It is perhaps necessary to stress also that it is comparative and essentially so. The important feature is cultural difference. When misunderstandings occur, neither Aboriginal nor western ideas can be given primacy, for it is the contrast that is critical.

Before summarising the plan of the book it is interesting to note that although attention is focused on one encounter in particular, that between Aborigines and whites at Aputula in the Northern Territory, the findings are probably of wider significance. That view is supported by two lines of evidence: first, Aboriginal social structure and practice at Aputula was based on kinship, a fact of importance for the study. That same feature has been noted of Aboriginal society in general. Second, certain significant linguistic features noted initially in Pitjantjatjara are present also in some Aboriginal languages in northern Australia. That similarity has been shown in a recent study undertaken with Barbara J. Sayers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. In addition, Paul Albrecht has confirmed the observation for the Aranda language in Central Australia. Furthermore, although no analysis has been undertaken, informed preliminary comment suggests that these same features are present in some languages in India, Thailand, Papua New Guinea and in the Amazon basin.

In this study the first eight chapters take the reader on a voyage of discovery seeking to explain the encounter at Aputula; in the last three the discoveries are put to use. Chapter 1 commences with the recognition by Aborigines and whites of a cross-cultural communication problem. A brief historical account follows describing Aboriginal contacts with non-Aboriginal people, and a number of modern examples from Aputula are given. Examination of these shows that communication is often limited in economic affairs. That lead is pursued, looking first at the work of A. P. Elkin, R. A. Gould and E. Kolig. These authors

have examined and explained economic encounters between Aborigines and whites, but their explanations prove unsatisfactory and an alternative must be sought. The result is three interrelated proposals that:

1. basic concepts and categories of thought be compared with a view to identifying significant difference;
2. the building blocks of Aboriginal thinking be sought in the field of economics;
3. Aboriginal rituals of economic significance be examined to uncover the ritual concepts upon which they are based.

In pursuit of these proposals three chapters of theoretical discussion follow. In the first of them, chapter 2, a brief comparison is made of the accounts of three chosen authors (A. P. Elkin, T. G. H. Strehlow and W. E. H. Stanner), concentrating on those concepts of central importance to us. These concepts are the process of sacred rites, their purpose, and the operative stimulus. Under the guidance of these authors our attention is directed to the Aboriginal concept of the Dreaming, to magic and to symbolism. When the present writer's view diverges from those under review, some discussion is offered of the reasons for the divergence.

In chapter 3, Aboriginal concepts of time and space are considered together with the Aboriginal use of classification. These matters form the basis of an alternative and cohesive statement of Aboriginal ritual and the basic concepts that underlie it. This statement introduces two major interrelated features of the Aboriginal conceptual system which particularly differentiate it from that of whites. The first feature is the characteristic use of one degree of abstraction only, thus retaining a direct link with content that is immediately provided by the senses. The second feature is the Aboriginal notion of interactional process. These features contrast with the white conceptual system and, if confirmed, could provide two explanatory tools by which to explain losses in cross-cultural communication.

In chapter 4, in order to explore the second of these features, the question of abstraction is discussed in the light of the view of genetic epistemologist Jean Piaget, whose theory of cognitive functioning is well known.

Chapter 5 directs attention away from theory to the world of reality. Since this book examines a particular Aboriginal-white encounter (although one of wide significance), this chapter describes the place, Aputula, where most of the events occurred but chiefly the people who took part in those events.

Our next concern is to give empirical support for the earlier theoretical discussion. Examination of the Pitjantjatjara language (chap. 6) and analysis of responses by Aputula Aborigines to a series of questions (chap. 7) provide empirical endorsement for the first of the proposed explanatory tools. A final short theoretical chapter (chap. 8) follows in which we discuss the second of the proposed explanatory devices, that is, the Aboriginal concept of process. This notion is examined and developed, and a contrast is drawn between Aboriginal and western ideas.

The foregoing chapters provide confirmation of a conceptual framework within which the reality of the Aboriginal-white encounter, and its difficulties, are explored and interpreted (chap. 9).

The final chapters explain the events used to exemplify the subject of study in chapter 1 and take up implications of the findings for theory (chap. 10) and for the ongoing encounter of traditional Aborigines and whites (chap. 11).

A word of explanation is in order. I refer to some of the people of the encounter as Aborigines and to others as whites or Westerners. Some readers may take exception to one or both of these terms. Westerners refers specifically to those who were involved in the events described, that is, to those whom the Aborigines encountered. They were of national origins commonly referred to as western. The Aputula Aborigines referred to them as whites. So, therefore, sometimes do I.

1

The Problem and Where to Find the Answer

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

'White man never tell Aborigine everything.'

'You can work with Aborigines all your life. They can teach you a lot;
then something happens and you find you don't know them.
You can't get to know a black.'

These two comments draw attention to our subject of study. The first was advanced in 1968 at Finke or, to use the Aboriginal name, at Aputula, a small township in the cattle country of Central Australia. It arose during a conversation with several traditional Aboriginal men, all of them middle-aged or elderly and all of whom had worked extensively as stockmen, either in the southern part of the Northern Territory or over the border in the far north of South Australia. Discussion showed that the opinion was general. The second comment was volunteered a year or two later by a white man who had grown up, lived and worked in the same area. He spoke the local Aboriginal language fluently and, like his father before him, he employed Aborigines.

One interesting thing is that all the men showed a degree of puzzlement and perhaps disappointment, but while Aborigines seemed to accuse whites of deliberately withholding information, the white did not actually reverse the charge. Nevertheless, all recognised if not a total failure in understanding, then a limitation. Even if unable to describe the gap in communication between them, they acknowledged its presence. Since all spoke from considerable experience and since the present writer's observations agree with theirs, the question to ask is, 'What is the white man's secret and why can't he get to know a black?'. In other words, 'What is the obstacle to better communication between traditional Aborigines and whites?'.

OVERVIEW OF ABORIGINAL CONTACT HISTORY

Before seeking the answer we can note that the question itself need not surprise us; rather it is to be expected. In the last ten to fifteen years, evidence has been accumulating to show that until recent times, the people living within Australia and those living without were separated from each other for many thousands of years. Much of the history of this separation is lost in the mists of time, but some information is available and a general picture is beginning to emerge.

It is generally accepted that the earliest migration into Australia occurred from the north during periods in the earth's history when, due to extreme cold, particularly large

masses of water were frozen into sheets of ice at the poles. This freezing lowered the sea level, reducing the length of sea crossings, and so making migration easier for early travellers (Kirk 1983:13-23; Flood 1983:29 ff.).

Since Aborigines were in the south-east of the continent by 35 000 to 40 000 years ago (Kirk 1983:15, 18-23), they must have arrived in Australia before that time and, from the geological record, it now appears likely that this occurred 50 000 to 55 000 years BP, that is, before the present (Flood1983:67-74).

Much later, about 10 000 to 8 000 BP, after two more major fluctuations in sea level, the land bridge between Australia and New Guinea was finally severed (Flood 1983:31-2; Kirk 1983:1, 128). From that time at least, a substantial sea barrier separated the people within Australia from even their nearest neighbours. Notwithstanding, as the archaeological record suggests, some immigration did occur later than this but, as Flood points out, it appears to have had no radical impact on the lifestyle of the people already in the country (Kirk 1983:26; Flood 1983:199).

Other types of data also support the idea of long and substantial separation between Australian and other populations. Kirk has shown from both genetic and linguistic evidence that this was of the order of 10 000 years, a figure that is in broad agreement with the geological and archaeological record (Kirk 1983:88-134). In addition, the genetic material points to some microevolution within the Australian continent, making a distinction between Aborigines of the north and those of the centre (Kirk 1983:119-20), suggesting some restriction in population movement within Australia itself.

Within the recent past, for 200 to 300 years before the arrival of white settlers, Aborigines of the Kimberley and Arnhem Land coasts had some encounters with Macassans from Indonesia (Flood 1983:224). Similarly, Aborigines of the northern half of Cape York Peninsula met visiting New Guineans and Torres Strait Islanders. Describing the Arnhem Land contacts, Warner stressed the conservatism of Aboriginal culture (Warner 1932:476-95, 1958:458 ff.) but Thomson disagreed, accenting instead the impact of Macassan ideas on Aboriginal exchange (Thomson 1949). Nevertheless in other respects, as Thomson's Arnhem Land work also made clear, the foreign influence did not overshadow indigenous culture. For instance, Aborigines retained the social and cultural importance of kinship and of totemism, a preference for the traditional that Thomson took up in his account of events on Cape York (Thomson 1933). Aborigines were conservative in other respects also. While it is uncertain how extensively they observed animal husbandry and agriculture, both used by their northerly neighbours, what is obvious is that they adopted none of this for themselves, preferring to remain hunter-gatherers (Kirk 1983:63; Flood 1983:219 ff.). Along the north coast, therefore, overseas visitors had some influence on local practice but made no radical difference to Aboriginal social structure and thought and, further, what influence they did have did not penetrate far to the south.

This brief historical sketch supports the view that to a significant degree, until the arrival of whites, Australian Aborigines were cut off from populations beyond the Australian mainland. Apart from the recent and rather limited contacts along the north coast, this separation endured for as long as 10 000 years and, in the centre and south of the continent, for perhaps many thousands of years more. It supports the view also that during this time those outside Australia and those within it pursued their own ideas, their

own cultural development, without any significant cross-fertilisation. It is interesting, therefore, to consider how long and how substantial is the meeting with whites. This contact varies in different parts of the continent, but our attention is directed to Central Australia.

For some adult Aborigines of this area, the encounter extends over four generations, but for many traditional people it involves only two. Others remember seeing their first white person and an elderly man laughed with me as he recalled the experience. One evening he and his family heard an unaccustomed roaring. The sound drew gradually nearer then, suddenly, to everyone's horror, a monster with enormous, glowing eyes came round the end of a low rise nearby. Immediately they all turned tail and fleeing over the sandhill sped for their very lives. Overnight nothing terrible happened so, next day, they crept carefully back to discover an Aborigine and two or three white men beside a motor vehicle bogged in the sand. That illustrates first generation contact, but even when such is not the case, neither Aborigine nor white need look back further than great-grandfather's day and many not that far.

If the time of the encounter has been limited, so also in some respects has been the content. It was not until late in the 1960s, and in some places not until the 1970s, that whites started trying seriously to consult with Aborigines. Until that time the substance of contact in much of Central Australia was probably limited to practical concerns, so that Aborigines and whites had few opportunities to enter each other's conceptual world and communication suffered. Encounters were practical rather than intellectual. This came about because, for one thing, whites were very sparsely settled (mainly on the vast cattle properties) and, for another, discussion with Aborigines was rare. Whites imposed their ideas and Aborigines cooperated in the work force, but if cooperation did not occur, then they went their several ways. As a result, while Aboriginal ritual practice was severely curtailed, traditional ideas were still in use. For instance, while it was often difficult to stage ceremonies, conceptually they retained their significance and their validity was not directly challenged. Likewise, sacred sites were still sacred and the old relationship to land was still present. As a result, kinship, totem and links to land continued to provide the basis for Aboriginal social and cultural action and, in many respects, this is still so today. Meanwhile whites busied themselves in their own affairs and, while depending on Aboriginal labour, did not come to understand the Aboriginal point of view.

Under the circumstances it is possible that even today in Central Australia the encounter between Aborigines and non-Aborigines must sometimes have to bridge 10 000 years and perhaps many thousands more. Small wonder then that Aborigines and whites do not always understand one another and sometimes interpret both events and actions differently. Nevertheless, to note this is merely to raise the original and deeper question: given the long and separate development, given that communication between traditional Aborigines and whites is sometimes limited or may even be lost, what are the roots of misunderstanding?

EXAMPLES SHOWING COMMUNICATION LOSS

This question of the roots of Aboriginal-white miscommunication is of general significance, but it arose for me from specific comments made at Aputula. The encounter of Aborigines and whites, as it took place there largely from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s, provides most of the examples used in this study and their analysis suggests an answer to the question. In earlier years, white settlement had severely disrupted traditional life in the whole area, but Aborigines were still living on or near their traditional land. At the same time, both in the town and on the cattle stations round about, whites followed their own pursuits but often employed Aboriginal workers. In approaching the subject, several common, seemingly simple, events will be used to draw attention to specific areas of mutual misunderstanding. In each example, communication between Aborigines and whites is at best partial.

On one occasion an urban Aboriginal visitor of mine said that he had attended many meetings of Aborigines and quite often the question was asked, 'Why don't the white people accept us?'. It was Saturday afternoon and we were sitting in my caravan at Aputula. Not long afterwards an Aborigine, already a little drunk, arrived at the door and asked me to give him $2.00 from his pension. I reminded him that he had received his money last week, that it was finished and that the next cheque was not due. He agreed but said another cheque would come next week and would I let him have $2.00 from that. Again I refused. He said, 'You my boss. You got to look after me'. So I went over the points again, explaining what he knew already, that I did not advance money, that his cheque was coming but it was not here yet, and so on. '*Ingkata*', he said, using the Aranda word for a ceremonial leader, 'That my money. You can't stop me', meaning I had no right to deny it to him. So I tried again, but he wanted his money now. It should be taken into account that the man was drunk and this no doubt had an influence on him, yet such a request was not made of strangers, but only of friends. Further, this man had worked in close association with whites for many years, from the time he was a young man, and now he was old. He was therefore acquainted with the ways of whites and of social security cheques. In the present instance there was no reason to doubt his thirst but there was no reason either to doubt his friendship. So first he just asked, then he called me boss, then he called me *ingkata*. Lastly, he stood off and called me everything, outrage in every line, and then went away. I turned to the Aborigine who had raised the question of acceptance. 'Can't you see there are two different systems working?' I asked, and he agreed. For the old man, I had refused to be the friend he thought me and it was my fault that there was trouble between us. It did not seem so to me, but why were our points of view so different?

Similar difficulties arose over food for a journey. Aborigines would set out with nothing, relying on whites in the party to provide. If they were given money or food to cover requirements, they gave it all to relatives before leaving and this the relatives expected. Later, during the course of the journey, if whites refused to share, they were assessed by Aborigines as unfriendly and greedy. This type of incident, like the example above, involves the handling of goods. It raises also the topic of friendship and of how people express such a relationship, elements that are often present in the problems that arise between Aborigines and whites.

I discussed the situation one day with some Aboriginal women. I said that if a white gives something to an Aborigine, then next day that person comes back to get more, bringing a number of relatives. They agreed that this was so. 'Why?' I asked. 'Friend', they said, and laughed. We all laughed.

While this phenomenon is well known to Westerners who work with traditional Aborigines, it needs to be rounded out so that it is more acutely observed and better appreciated.

Sometimes a transfer of goods was not in question but rather their use in providing a service. Not infrequently I went out in my Land Rover to help in gathering firewood for the camp. One afternoon in mid-summer three of the older Aboriginal school girls came in and asked if I would take them to get firewood to cook a rabbit; the man at the head of their household had gone out shooting and had asked me to assist in this way. Now it does not take much wood to cook a few rabbits and there were three of the household with a couple of hours in which to get it. I was trying desperately to catch the last mail before Christmas and this I attempted to explain. When the rabbit-hunter returned, he was furious to find no wood and it was I who was blasted, not the girls.

On another occasion, having much official correspondence to answer, I did not attend the weekly picture show. After the films ended my tribal 'brother' asked me to take him and his party to shoot rabbits, a local night-time occupation for anyone prepared to throw the beam of his headlights on the rabbit and to risk his vehicle in the chase. Tyres were the most likely casualties because they were easily staked. I did not join in this kind of hunting because I could not afford the cost of wear-and-tear on my vehicle, although at times food was in short supply. In any case, I was by that time tired and said so. Later an Aborigine woke me up and asked that I go to camp to attend a woman visitor. She had received a nasty head wound in a drunken fight. A few days later my 'brother' took me to task, not for helping the woman but for refusing to go shooting that night with him. He argued that I was not tired as I had claimed. He did not make allowance for the fact that I had been working solidly until 11:00 p.m. and must by that time have been weary. All would have been well had I gone to bed and stayed there. But what had happened? Later in the night I had responded to a stranger and so proved that tiredness was just an excuse to avoid going rabbiting with him in spite of our good relationship. I explained what had happened and immediately the explanation was accepted, but why did he get angry? He had seen the blood pouring from the wound and he was sober, so why did I have to explain?

There were other problems of understanding too; for instance, in asking for help to find something, it was always wise to start with a statement like, 'I am not blaming you but. . .' Why was that necessary? Similarly, why, in the event of a minor disaster, was offence taken (enough to start a fight or to cause a man to leave his job) if someone, who had nothing to do with it, was asked to clear up the mess? Why in both these examples was the request tantamount to accusation? Whites could expect a friend to help at just such a moment because he/she was a friend.

Why did Aborigines stand back when there was a job to be done and leave others to struggle? They did not go away; they stood and watched and joined in any laughter, but they did not help unless asked and then did so willingly. Why, conversely, if you saw them

struggling with something and offered help was offence taken? Why was it unfriendly to make the offer?

These things did not happen all the time but often enough. Custom—yes, but so much of white custom was turned neatly upside down. Why neatly?

To use a last example: one day we were setting out to go hunting and the Land Rover had the usual complement of passengers for such a trip. Since I could not be sure where the proposed hunting area would be, ten metres or twenty kilometres from the road, perhaps across several creeks and over heaps or slabs of rock, near water or without, I had to be careful about the number of passengers and dogs and about the amount of gear, water and spare petrol that I carried. As far as I could judge from a glance at the springs, on this occasion I was near the upper load limit, but as we set off, an elderly and very stout woman flagged me down. As nicely as I could, I refused to take her. As we left her standing by the side of the road, a fact of which I was only too well aware, I said to the man beside me, 'You were thinking of your relation'. 'You were thinking of your car', he replied. This is a very simple example, so easily explained, but what lies behind the explanation?

Looking back over the examples, we see that misunderstandings often occur in two areas in particular, both of them important for Aboriginal and white relationships: first over the use of material goods and second over things to do with friendship. The first topic has been of continuing concern to other authors, mainly anthropologists.

COMMUNICATION LOSS IN ECONOMIC ENCOUNTERS

Elkin was one of the first to describe and explain economic encounters. Observing Aboriginal attempts to acquire the white people's goods, he suggested that in the early days of contact a situation of mutual dependence developed: Aborigines wanted certain material items from white people and whereas once they adjusted their mode of life to the natural environment, now they adjusted it to white newcomers. For their part, whites initially depended on Aboriginal labour and sometimes wanted access to Aboriginal women. The result was a process in which for their own purposes each adapted to the other. Later, as Elkin went on to point out, when the equilibrium of this dependence was disturbed and whites no longer depended so much on Aborigines, Aborigines continued to rely on whites, particularly where breakdown of traditional society was severe (Elkin 1951:167-72).

A different explanation was offered by Gould from his experience in Western Australia. He found that Aborigines of the Warburton Ranges and those in towns such as Leonora and Laverton had a marked materialist orientation. These people often begged from whites with such insistence that their requests became demands. Moreover, if a white person gave something to an Aborigine, the recipient might well return bringing relatives with him to make further requests, a practice that caused difficulties. Gould suggested that the problem arose because people held divergent views of what was offered at the initial contact: for whites it was a completed transaction, but Aborigines hoped to establish a bond of kin relationship and with it a basis for further requests (Gould 1969:186-9).

Writing of the Fitzroy Crossing area of the Kimberley, Western Australia, Kolig also noted Aboriginal aspiration for the material assets of whites. He took the view that

misunderstandings occurred because Aborigines misinterpreted white society and culture, interpreting them by the traditional model. For instance, Aborigines sometimes suspected that whites withheld vital information, and they compared the content of this secret with the secret-sacred of Aboriginal law (Kolig 1972:4-5). Likewise, they equated the economic activities of whites with their own traditional ones (Kolig 1972:14-5). Kolig wrote that the key to the difficulty lay in conceptual differences and, in exploring this possibility, advanced an Aboriginal view of the world, a cosmology, capable of accommodating the whites and their products. According to this interpretation, traditional Aborigines conceive a universe in which there are two spheres, analogous to two regions. One of these is fully known by observation, but the other, the cosmological periphery, is not available to the senses. Elements within this last include the supernatural and spiritual, the mythological and the unknown geographical world, and these are qualitatively 'not different' from each other. That region is the source of the unknown, including the white people and all their works; thus from it their goods and profit flow (Kolig 1972:6, 14-6).

Here, then, are three explanations of economic contacts between Aborigines and whites:

1. whereas previously Aborigines collected from the natural environment, now they collect from whites; hunter-gatherers continue their hunting-gathering (Elkin);
2. Aboriginal kin share, and white adopted 'kin' are expected to do the same (Gould);
3. Aborigines interpret events according to a traditional model based on a view of the world that is different from that of whites (Kolig).

Each of these proposals, although differing in detail, involves the interpretation of western ideas according to traditional Aboriginal models and culture, the point that Kolig makes. While Elkin's and Gould's explanations are valid as far as they go, each taking up points of Aboriginal custom, they are unsatisfactory because neither looks below the surface. Neither examines the deeper foundations of Aboriginal behaviour and expectation. Kolig attempts to do this and rightly asserts that conceptual differences are at the heart of misunderstanding, but his account of these differences is unconvincing. Difficulty is inherent in the notion of two spheres: items of the one are visible and fully known by observation; those of the other cannot be observed but are the source of the unknown or exotic. Contrary to Aboriginal accounts, Kolig makes no allowance for a mythological, invisible source (as recorded by Elkin, 1969:88) or origin (as Strehlow, 1964:727 ff., puts it) for elements of the known world.

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS: COMPARING BASIC CONCEPTS

None of these authors, therefore, gives a satisfactory account of economic contacts between Aborigines and whites. Notwithstanding, first, we accept the idea that Aborigines interpret aspects of white society and culture according to traditional notions, but add the corollary that Westerners do the same: each interprets the other's society and culture according to their own model. This occurs not in economic affairs alone but generally. Second, Kolig is correct that misunderstanding is grounded in conceptual difference, but

in developing this insight he contrasts Aboriginal and western ideas about the cosmos. It is preferable to seek differences not in the cosmologies but instead in the coordinated, conceptual building blocks and assumptions that undergird them. That will be the approach followed here. In seeking conceptual contrast, therefore, we will not look at cosmologies but seek to uncover fundamental elements of Aboriginal ideology. Attention will be focused on the basic set of ideas through which people understand the universe and themselves within it, that is, on assumptions about the nature of being (ontological assumptions); the concepts of space, time and causality (epistemological categories); and ideas about the properties of matter.

Three points are important. First, by definition, such an enquiry is hazardous. Since examination is unavoidably made from the perspective of an alien understanding, that of the anthropologist, limitations and risks are inherent. W. E. H. Stanner noted this tension and the constraints that necessarily accompany it. He suggested that we can modify our own concepts and categories of thought so that they are more suitable to the material under review (Stanner 1965:222). This idea exemplifies the problem: modification may well produce no more than variation on a theme, yet here in all probability we have alternative themes, one rooted in Aboriginal ideas and the other in our own. For this reason Stanner's suggestion is not altogether satisfactory. The only alternative is to acknowledge that we approach the Aboriginal conceptual world from a western perspective, and that while we attempt to hear what Aborigines say, in the end can do no more than set down what that sounds like—from where we stand.

Second, it is perhaps necessary to stress that the concepts and categories of any particular ideology or philosophy are no mere heap of disparate notions; a people's world view is a system of ideas, as anthropologists assert.[1] Anthropologists do not postulate absolute consistency in every detail; nevertheless they maintain that a people's ideas are systematic, they are coherent. The implication of this is that the underlying ideas we seek are themselves coordinated. Were it otherwise, people could not understand the world or their relation to it.

Third, the Aboriginal and western conceptual systems are different but, recalling a point made above, Aborigines and whites alike interpret ideas and events according to their own system. It follows that when individuals meet and ideas pass from one system to the other, they undergo refraction relative to their system of origin. They are deflected on entering the alternative set of ideas and thus no longer carry all the previous content or significance. The result is some loss in communication. Similarly, when Aborigines and whites take part in or observe the same event, they interpret it in terms of their own conceptual world. Expectations, therefore, are different and again communication is limited. An analogy can be drawn between an idea and a beam of light. When light passes obliquely from a medium of one density into another of different density, it is refracted or deflected from its previous course. Relative to Aboriginal ideas, the refracting medium is the western conceptual system, and in reverse the Aboriginal system refracts ideas originating in the western. To say this is not to infer that the angle of refraction is the same in all bands of the ideational spectrum. Some exchanges occur in which there is little if any deflection, and consequently little if any misunderstanding, but in other cases, where refraction is greater, the loss in communication is significant.

The above outlines the two assumptions essential to this study:

1. that since the conceptual systems of Aborigines and whites differ, then ideas from one system are refracted upon entering the other;
2. that since Aborigines and whites are rational beings, the refraction is systematic.

This can be set down more generally in terms of a simple, basic definition of culture: *culture is a set of coordinated ideas*. It follows that when people of one culture encounter people of another culture, the conceptual encounter or exchange will be structured; it will be systematic. Consquently, it can be understood and losses in communication explained.

As the foregoing makes plain, this study depends upon comparison. It does not challenge the Aboriginal reality nor the western. Neither is presented as the standard, since for communication it is the difference that is the significant feature.

One point of terminology requires clarification: the relationship between culture, conceptual system and world view. As the terms are used here, the last two in themselves are expressions of culture as also are, for instance, the epistemology and language. Culture is inherent in them too. No hard and fast line is drawn between conceptual system and world view. The first emphasises the system of building blocks that underlies thought, notions expressed for instance by a noun or a verb, and the second tends to emphasise the coordinated edifice made with that building material, including ideas about the world, how it began, how it works, and human beings within it. All three terms refer to something learned, not instinctive, to ideas passed from one generation to the next. Common to all three, and necessarily so, are the basic and coordinated concepts and categories of thought, the epistemology. In what follows, the term 'culture' is used sometimes, but more often one of the other terms is preferred. Since our interest is in a system of ideas, this practice does not affect the argument; rather it shifts the emphasis to one or other aspect of the ideational system.

It is important to draw attention to one last point. As set out, the objective is to explain the meeting of Aborigine and white in terms of the conceptual encounter. This being so we can hope, even expect, that the explanation will be of general usefulness, shedding light on the thinking of preliterate peoples as contrasted with the thinking of literate, industrialised people. This topic will be examined, among others, when considering theoretical implications of the findings (chap. 10).

A starting point for the enquiry has been identified already: the initial examples and also the work of Elkin, Gould and Kolig all show problems in the field of economics. This then appears a fruitful area of search and we do not have to look far within it to find contrasting ideas. Rites of increase are performed by traditional Aborigines throughout the dry central regions of the continent, including the area of Aputula. These rites point to the presence of alternative assumptions about the nature of being and the functional relationship of humans to matter. On the one hand, we have the western concept that entities exist without human intervention. For whites, the existence of the cosmos and of the living is not something people must, or can, sustain; rather the physical world is there to use. On the other hand, we have the Aboriginal assumption that physical existence and/or life must be maintained, renewed, or created by human beings. In accord with this idea, desert Aborigines engage in sacred ceremonial activity to ensure continuance of the material

universe and of life. The first step, then, is to identify the nature of the process by which they do this and the related ideas that explain why the action is thought to be effective. Our expectation is that further conceptual contrasts will be shown.

NOTES

1 Many have noted this, for instance Evans-Pritchard (1937:194, 1972:7, 112); Hallpike (1976:264); Durkheim and Mauss (1969:81-8); Lévi-Strauss (1966:135); Stanner (1979:27-8, 33); Elkin (1969:85-6); Burridge (1973:69-70, 242).

2

The Aboriginal World: Some Western Views

People engage in ritual action for a reason and Aborigines are no exception. While this, no doubt, is a truism, not much has been written about the basis of effectiveness in Aboriginal ritual. Descriptions of ceremony abound, their functions and purposes have been studied, but the underlying concepts have received less attention. This limits what we know of ritual, but the concern here is to find out what is happening and why it is effective. We ask, therefore, 'What is the nature of this ritual action? What is the goal and process and what is causative?'. More colloquially, 'What's going on? Why? How does it work?'.

In answering these questions our primary purpose is to uncover the underlying concepts, but at the same time we will learn more about ritual itself. This is inevitable, for while concepts and rites can be separated in thought, it is not so in practice. Ritual is the bearer or expression of conceptual commitment; thus, as we learn of the one, the other becomes clearer as well. Further, since ideologies are systematic, since culture is a set of coordinated ideas, then the concepts we derive from ritual must be in harmony with each other and, in addition, be appropriate to rites in general. In turn, the various types of ceremony, as expressions of a system of ideas, must themselves be integrated or at least broadly consistent.

It is not the intention to review the extensive literature on Aboriginal ritual but rather to concentrate on the writings of three of the earlier scholars whose work is outstanding in this field and who have to some extent addressed questions that concern us. These are A. P. Elkin, T. G. H. Strehlow and W. E. H. Stanner. Wherever possible, emphasis will be placed on statements which appear to reflect the author's general views on the questions at issue. Recourse will be made to more isolated statements only where it becomes necessary in order to make particular comparisons. Initially, since the Central Australian rites of increase provide the conceptual lead, attention will be concentrated on them, but afterwards two other major types of rite, both common throughout Aboriginal Australia, will be discussed. These are the initiatory and historical rituals. Then, lastly (in chap. 3), a brief comment will draw the mortuary ceremonies, peculiar to northern Australia, into the overall plan.

WHAT AUTHORITIES SAY

In ritual Aborigines act in terms of their belief or understanding about the nature of the universe, its beginnings and its continuing. Essential elements of this understanding are, firstly, the Aboriginal concept referred to by the Aranda[1] as *altjira* and, secondly, the activities of totemic ancestors. Since we seek to know what is happening in ritual, we note briefly what the three selected authorities have to say on these two topics.

The Dreaming concept and totemic ancestors

According to Elkin *altjira* is the Dreaming—the source of all that happens and of all that exists; it is the sole, inexhaustible, invisible, potent and eternal ground of being. Neither space nor chronological time are relevant to it (Elkin 1969:88-9). By contrast, Stanner describes a multi-faceted notion. According to him the Dreaming is in some ways a narrative of past events, a charter for present or ongoing events, and a principle of order that covers everything of significance. Moreover, *altjira* is not located within chronological time, and history, in western terms, is alien to it (Stanner 1979:23-4). Strehlow disagrees; he maintains that the word *altjira* means 'eternal, uncreated, sprung out of itself' (Strehlow 1971:614). This translation suggests a quality, for *altjira* is a word that characterises or describes.

All three authors report that totemic ancestors, some of whom were male, others female,[2] were involved in creation. This creation was from something already extant. It was not achieved *ex nihilo*, for the basic elements, including the earth and life, were already in existence. As a result of action by the ancestors, or, as Stanner puts it less specifically, as a result of events in which totemic ancestors took part (Stanner 1965:230), features of the physical world were made: rocks and waters appeared and sometimes ancestral personages were themselves transformed into trees or rocks (Elkin 1969:87; Strehlow 1947:7-9, 17, 26; 1964:727-9). This creation was patterned, having an orderliness taken for granted by Aborigines (Elkin 1969:90) but questioned seriously by them as evidence of intent (Stanner 1965:215, 227). Strehlow emphasises that the totemic ancestors are still alive today, an idea present also in Elkin's work (Strehlow 1947:17; 1964:729; Elkin 1979:225-6).

These authors give differing accounts of the process of creation. During the course of their creative activities, the heroes (as Elkin refers to them) wandered about the countryside transforming and revealing its features. These features were already in existence but invisible in the Dreaming (Elkin 1969:88, 94). According to Stanner, totemic ancestors took part in 'marvels' in the course of which the world and all things were structured in form, style and function, and they left a pool or hill or outcrop of rock as a sign to mark a site where patterning took place (Stanner 1965:214, 230). Strehlow's account is different again. He writes that as a consequence of everyday activities, totemic ancestors moulded and shaped their environment. This moulding became not merely a mark showing where action occurred but a permanent record of that action (Strehlow 1947:25-8).

Totemic ancestors were concerned also with life, not with life in general but life that was specific in respect of totem; for instance, the fig ancestor with fig life, the kangaroo ancestor with kangaroo life. Elkin writes that the rocks or trees into which some of the heroes were transformed became the storage centres for spirit-children and the 'life-cells' of natural species and natural phenomena. These spiritual elements were 'pre-existent' and were associated with the particular hero involved (Elkin 1969:87). We might give as examples kangaroo hero and kangaroo life-cells. Spirit-centres also resulted from sacred and ceremonial action undertaken by heroes who, by this means, left spirit-children or the life or life-cells of species at particular sites (Elkin 1979:176, 221-3). Strehlow records three ways in which totemic ancestors were involved with life. First, they freed partly fused, embryonic human infants who were lying under the earth's surface. Next, they

themselves were a source of life; for instance, places where ancestors first emerged from the earth remained saturated with their life, as did their transformed bodies such as rocks, trees and *tjurunga*.[3] Last, totemic ancestors also left a 'trail of life'. Today a portion of such a trail, on entering a pregnant woman, becomes the second or immortal 'life' or 'soul' of the developing foetus.[4] Each human being is thus the reincarnation of a totemic ancestor (Strehlow 1964:727-31). In his general account, Stanner refers to a 'potential of life', of humans and of natural species, and to child-spirits. Both of these are pre-existent and both are present at sites where marvels occurred, but he does not say how they came to be there (Stanner 1965:218, 230). However, some insight can be gained from Stanner's account of the Murinbata (Murrinh-patha) who hold that totemic ancestors deposited child-spirits in pools of water (Stanner 1966:10).

Only two authors describe the power used by totemic ancestors, and their accounts differ. According to Elkin the heroes used a potency of the Dreaming that was inherent in themselves, but he does not further describe that power (Elkin 1969:88). Strehlow's account shows totemic ancestors who exercised their own physical strength, but they also wielded magical weapons and sang as they worked. And the songs had magical efficacy (Strehlow 1947:21-6).

A further point is that totemic ancestors or heroes instituted all rites and established all Aboriginal custom (Elkin 1979:201, 231; Strehlow 1947:33-5; 1971:126, 332).

Aboriginal ritual

It is pertinent now to consider what men do in ritual. The ceremonies we examine are termed increase rites by Strehlow and Elkin but maintenance rites by Stanner. The first name incorporates the notion of begetting, but the second does not. Aborigines undertake these rites with the purpose of ensuring the 'continuity of man, natural species, and phenomena' (Elkin 1969:88, 91); of man and natural species (Stanner 1965:218); of natural species and phenomena (Strehlow 1964:732-3; 1971:278); or, more generally, in order to ensure that the universe as a whole remains in a state of continual well-being (Strehlow 1970:132).

According to Elkin the process used in ritual is one of cooperation with nature whose processes are conceived in spiritual terms. Such action promotes the 'regular' and ensures that nature will continue to function normally. Elkin specifically rejects the idea of magical control, used to produce the 'irregular and extraordinary' (Elkin 1979:228). Stanner has developed a general statement of ritual process and, presumably, it applies to rites of maintenance. Aborigines, he holds, observe form, structure and pattern in the world about them, that is, in what Westerners refer to as 'nature'. They maintain and renew this design by a process of symbolisation. The complex patterns formed during the rituals are the symbols (Stanner 1965:215, 232-3). Since men renew design already present in nature, this symbolising process can also be regarded as a type of cooperation. Strehlow, by contrast, takes up the point rejected by Elkin. In his view, men use a magical process to exert control (Strehlow 1971:244, 416-7), and this ritual action is necessary to ensure that nature's functioning remains consistent and harmonious (Strehlow1970:132). In addition to their general comments, the two authors further describe process. Elkin notes that men continue

the revealing and transforming work of the heroes, and he refers also to a process of release (Elkin 1969:87-8, 91). But Strehlow stresses honouring and worshipping, pleasing and propitiating the totemic ancestors, processes that incorporate significant elements of mime and symbolisation (Strehlow 1971:315, 334, 341-2).

The final topic here is that of stimulus or efficient cause. There are two facets to consider. First, Elkin states that in rites of increase, Dreaming potency is effective; he notes also the use of magic (Elkin 1969:88, 90-1). Strehlow emphasises this last. In his account rites depend heavily on magic although, if the rites are to be effective, they require the presence of totemic ancestors (Strehlow 1971:332-3, 341). Stanner is dissatisfied with definitions of magic as a kind of 'false science' and with the notions of imitation associated with it. He develops the idea of symbolisation but he does not describe efficient cause (Stanner 1965:215, 218, 221-2). Instead he writes (of the Murinbata) that totemic ancestors taught people what to do but they did not tell them why the action was effective (Stanner 1966:10).

Second, in connection with increase ceremonies, authors refer to the complex array of spiritual or supernatural potencies that, as we have seen, are closely associated with totemic ancestors. These potencies constitute a facet of efficient cause and on them people depend. Elkin writes that ceremonies of increase release the 'life' or 'spirits' of natural species (Elkin 1979:222) or, as he refers to them elswhere, the 'life-cells' or 'existence-potentials' of species and phemonena (Elkin 1969:87). These then go out to be incarnated or 'born' (Elkin 1969:91; 1979:223). Ceremonies of the same type release spirit-children, the cause of pregnancy in women (Elkin 1979:223). While these rites are all similar in type, Elkin states that those for plants and animals may not act directly on the spiritual entities themselves. Many Aborigines believe that rituals influence a hero who in turn sends out the life or spirits of the same species as he did in the Dreamtime (Elkin 1979:225-6). Stanner writes that child-spirits act on their own initiative to bring about pregnancy in women but that, by ritual action, men ought to assist them in this work. Similarly, men must promote the release of the potential of life which is present at the totem places (Stanner 1965:218). Strehlow's account differs again. We have noted his description of the trails of life and that part of such a trail provides a human embryo with its second 'soul',[5] but there is no suggestion that ritual affects either the trails or their parts. Instead, an ancestor appears to take his own initiative. On the other hand, in Strehlow's work rites of increase are necessary for species, and he gives many detailed descriptions of these rituals. Important in the ceremonies are the rocks and *tjurunga* into which, during creation, the ancestors were sometimes transformed. During the rites, men grind dust from the surface of such a rock and scatter fragments of down from ceremonial decorations. Both kinds of particle give rise to individual plants or animals. These are of a kind appropriate to the particular totemic ancestor whose dust is scattered or whose ceremony is celebrated, for instance, acacia seed and plants from the dust of an acacia rock (Strehlow 1971:279, 293, 295, 314). Strehlow emphasises that while by ritual action men influence their totems, that is, animals, plants and phenomena, this influence is exerted solely through the supernatural ancestors from whom both human beings and nature originate (Strehlow 1964:732-3).

KEY CONCEPTS ASSESSED

This brief comparative study yields three important points regarding Aboriginal ritual. First, the purpose or final cause of Aboriginal rites is the increase or maintenance of human beings, of natural species and, in the work of Elkin and Strehlow, of the inanimate universe. Second, spiritual potencies are important in this process and all three authors refer to them. Third, on the subject of ritual process and stimulus (both topics of major concern to us), Elkin, Stanner and Strehlow disagree and a summary shows the important points:

- Strehlow writes of mime and symbolisation associated with magical process and magical cause;
- Stanner describes a process of symbolisation to maintain or renew design visible in 'nature', but he does not take up the topic of causality;
- Elkin holds that by ritual action men transform what exists already in the Dreaming (*altjira*) and refers to a Dreaming potency and to magical cause.

It is clear, therefore, that if we are to understand ritual, key concepts are 'Dreaming', magic and symbolisation.[6] One or more of these concepts emerges as a cornerstone of the work of one or more authors and we examine them now in more detail. All writers record the Dreaming concept but translate it very differently. What is its meaning? Are the notions of magical process and magical cause congenial to the Aboriginal conceptual system? What of symbolisation? Answers to these questions will lead to a critical assessment of the work of the three authorities and open the way to the development of an alternative.

'Dreaming'

Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen in *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899) were the first to note the word *alcheringa*, but in their later work, *The Arunta* (2 vols. 1927), the spelling was altered to *alchera*. The form adopted here, *altjira*, follows Strehlow's usage (but omits his diacritical marks) and is common in the literature. The original translation given by Spencer and Gillen was 'dream time' and while this is still sometimes used, authors prefer 'Dreaming' or, more usually, 'the Dreaming'. This term is inadequate to convey the Aboriginal thought, and both Elkin and Stanner, among others, have attempted to spell out the meaning of the concept (Elkin 1969:87-9; Stanner 1979:23 ff.). Strehlow, whose understanding of the Aranda language is unrivalled in the literature, gives a direct translation and also some derivatives of the term. As we have seen, the result is fundamentally different from the meanings given by Elkin and Stanner.

Aborigines from other language groups in other places use different words for the same or a similar concept, for instance *djukur* in adjoining areas of South, Western and Central Australia; *bugari* near La Grange and Broome; *wongar* in north-east Arnhem Land (Elkin 1979:210); *bugari* noted also by Stanner (1965:214); and *djugurba* in the Western Desert (Berndt 1974, fascicle1:7). Using a different orthography from Elkin and Berndt, Wallace (1977:75) and Gould (1969:205) record the same term *tjukurpa* in other Western Desert dialects.

Writing of the Aranda *altjira*, Strehlow shows that translation is not easy (Strehlow 1971:614). The same is so of *tjukurpa*,[7] the related term used by Pitjantjatjara and Yangkuntjatjara. Some years ago I referred to *tjukurpa* as 'the eternal Dreaming, perhaps close to the Greek logos, a story', but noted also that the precise connotation is difficult to determine and that the meaning 'remains elusive' (Bain 1978-1979:319, 325).

Translating *tjukurpa* into English is similarly difficult from the Aboriginal perspective. One day a Yangkuntjatjara man was telling a group of white people about his culture. This initiated and middle-aged traditional Aborigine, a fluent English speaker, declared himself dissatisfied with the English translation of *tjukurpa*. ' "Dreaming" isn't right. Something wrong with it.' He went on to say that he was unable to find the right words and added, 'so I say "Dreaming" '. A day or two later, discussion brought out that when Aborigines refer to something as *tjukurpa*, then this is what they are saying:

- that thing is there (exists) in its own right
- it just is itself
- no one invented it
- no one thought it up
- no one made it
- it just is (simply exists)
- eternal
- true.

This is so of anything to which the word is applied: things, events, action, songs, dancing, ritual, myths, places, ceremonial decoration.

The following week, several fully initiated, middle-aged, traditional Pitjantjatjara confirmed this rendering for their language.

The concept of *tjukurpa*, then, takes in a range of meaning and has several aspects:

- it is adjectival;
- it denotes the quality or the property of the thing referred to;
- it denotes being, thus introducing the existential or verbal element 'is'.

In short, it specifies features or characteristics of the thing to which it is applied.

This translation of *tjukurpa* is similar to Strehlow's of *altjira*: both are descriptive in some sense, indicating quality; in both the eternal aspect is essential. Further, in compound form both words are used in referring to dreaming while asleep: Aranda, *altjirarama* 'to dream' (Strehlow 1971:614) and Pitjantjatjara; *tjukurmananyi* 'dreaming' (present indicative). The terms contrast in that *altjira* is restricted in its usage (Strehlow 1971:614) but *tjukurpa* is widely applied; nevertheless the similarity is significant.

Obviously linguistic difficulties abound for Westerners in trying to understand Aboriginal concepts and translate them. Nevertheless, there is sufficient certainty for us to accept the above translation of *tjukurpa* and to use it as a basis from which to assess the work of Elkin and Stanner. The consequences are considerable: first, their basic statements

or descriptions of the concept become untenable and, second, so also does Elkin's account of ritual process and cause. He took the view that the Dreaming is the invisible everlasting source and that both heroes and participants in ritual have access to it. Moreover, inherent in the heroes is a Dreaming potency and that potency is operative also in the rites. Since *tjukurpa* is neither source nor potent, these ideas cannot be sustained.

When attempting to isolate an unknown concept it is easy to mistake wood for trees, to direct attention to the thing itself instead of to its quality or characteristics. This error was one I made in an earlier translation of *tjukurpa*, just noted (Bain 1978-1979). The same type of mistake appears to have been made by Elkin and Stanner who confused quality and substance, resulting in an unsatisfactory understanding of the Aboriginal concept and of the related ideas about ritual process and cause.

Magic

Magic is the next key concept to consider. In Strehlow's work magic is central and Elkin also identifies magical cause.

In his description of magic and religion, James Frazer identifies magic as a 'false science' in which imitative and contagious magic are based respectively on the laws of similarity and contagion. Magic is exercised through rite and spell, both of which must be correctly performed in every detail, and it draws on forces that are impersonal, not intrinsic to human beings but used by them to control nature (Frazer 1959:11-12, 48-50, 52). Malinowski makes similar points. He holds that magic is not a force of nature but instead a 'human possession' and he draws a clear line of separation between the magician and the power, or magic force, that he wields. As he writes, the practitioner's body is merely 'the receptacle of magic and the channel of its flow' (Malinowski 1974:28-9, 73, 75-6). For its effectiveness, then, magic relies upon forces of one kind or another. Religion by contrast depends on powerful supernatural beings, a point made by both Malinowski (Malinowski 1974:87-9) and Frazer according to whom religion is 'a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life' (Frazer 1959:50). Despite this distinction between magic and religion, Frazer notes the presence of spirits in some magic rituals. When this occurs, in true magic, they are treated as inanimate and coerced into assisting (Frazer 1959:51).

With this definition of the concept of magic both Frazer and Malinowski distinguish between personal power and impersonal force and also between the animate and the inanimate. Such a separation is congenial to western thought, but Aborigines do not make that distinction. To note this is certainly not to imply that Aborigines do not recognise the difference between the living and the non-living. Any such interpretation entirely misses the point being made. What is at issue is that in sacred affairs Aborigines direct attention elsewhere and away from that particular distinction. In those contexts it is irrelevant. As a result we cannot posit use of magical process and cause in Aboriginal rites, for such notions are alien to the Aboriginal conceptual system. Further, in the Aboriginal context, the magic/religion dichotomy becomes meaningless.

The lack of a real distinction between animate and inanimate can be readily identified

in the anthropological literature, and we have already seen some examples of it. For instance, Elkin reports that Aborigines give the same kind of attention in ritual to the spirit-children of humans and to the life-cells or existence-potentials of plant and animal species and of inanimate phenomena. Stanner refers to a potential of life, borrowing an idea from physics, and Strehlow to a trail of life that breaks into parts. In these last two cases life appears as an invisible something that has actuality apart from the individual it animates. Notions such as these suggest a hazy interface between personal and impersonal.

Again in mythology, the totemic ancestor is at one moment a living creature or person and the next moment a rock without losing the essential living quality. Furthermore, the myths are not merely stories, but can be concretely illustrated. When showing some geographic feature of interest Aborigines do not say, 'Those rocks are like men', but instead, 'Those rocks are men', thus exhibiting a lack of concern for the Westerner's distinction.

Strehlow's work provides a different type of example. He records that the magic weapons used by totemic ancestors are believed to be alive (Strehlow 1947:21-2) and that the magic songs, or more correctly each of the individual couplets that together make up the songs, are referred to by Aranda as a name (Strehlow1971:126, 284). In conceptualising both weapons and songs, therefore, Aborigines have included an element of living.

Lastly, M. J. Meggitt, in his account of the Walbiri (Warlpiri), describes *guruwari*, non-personal entities that were deposited at specific spirit places by Dreamtime beings (Meggitt 1962:64, 68). This depositing also occurs during ritual when fragments of plant or bird down are shaken from bodily decorations and transformed into the *guruwari*. These fragments are held to be such things as uncircumcised boys, kangaroos, hakea flowers, spears and the winds. Further, they are essentially of the same nature as the living beings who produced them but at the same time are impersonal (Meggitt 1962:65). This, for Westerners, is a contradiction.

In his discussion of Aranda ritual, Strehlow uses Frazer's description of magic (Strehlow 1971:336), but as these few examples show, Aborigines do not conceive a hard and fast line between personal and impersonal, between animate and inanimate and thus between personal strength and impersonal force. Such divisions are inherent in the concept of magic and constitute part of the basis on which magic and religion are contrasted. It is clear that the western notions arise in an epistemology or conceptual system alien to the Aboriginal, that they are incompatible with it, and that some other explanation must be found for ritual process and cause.

Symbolisation

Symbolisation remains to be discussed. It is particularly important for Stanner's work, but all three authorities refer to it in descriptions of Aboriginal ritual.

None of the authors defines the term 'symbol', but their use appears to conform with the Oxford dictionary definition (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1939):

> something that stands for, represents or denotes, something else (not by exact resemblance but by vague suggestion, or by some accidental or conventional relation).

The question to ask now is this: do traditional Aboriginal people themselves envisage symbolisation; in ritual do they see themselves as using symbols and taking symbolic action? This question has not been asked by the three authors, but it seems an affirmative answer has been assumed. This would be easy to do, for the idea of a symbol is commonly accepted among Westerners. On the other hand, perhaps, as with the notion of magic, something foreign is superimposed upon the Aboriginal conceptual system. This is the more likely since, on examination, the so-called symbols prove either to incorporate an aspect of reality, that is, they do not merely stand for something else but include an element of that something, or, alternatively, the so-called symbolic action is physically effective. In every instance, the concept of life itself is a factor. That suggests the need for caution in any attribution of symbolisation since, as we have just noted, in ritual contexts Aborigines do not make the same distinction as Westerners between the animate and the inanimate.

Writing of *tjurunga* Elkin states that they are symbols of the Dreaming, but then, seeking to describe the Aboriginal idea further, he makes the different point that they 'are themselves dreaming. . .' (Elkin 1979:211). This second statement throws the notion of symbol into doubt, a doubt that is endorsed by his examples. For instance, life and strength from the Dreaming is mediated to a sick person when he is rubbed with a *tjurunga*. What is conveyed is not symbolic, presumably, but actual life and strength, derived during contact with the *tjurunga*, supporting therefore a notion of reality as opposed to that of symbol.

A similar difficulty can be seen in Strehlow's account. While he reports that in Aranda thinking a particular rock or a *tjurunga* represents an ancestor, thus suggesting symbol, he emphasises also that each one *is* the totemic ancestor, *is* his changed body, and that each remains charged with his life (Strehlow 1947:4, 16-8), thus accenting the real.

In other respects also tension between symbol and real is present in Strehlow's work. We have noted above from his writing that totemic ancestors instituted all the rites. Today in ritual those taking part must adhere strictly to every detail, an undertaking that requires accuracy both in the chants and in the action. In addition, rites of increase must be undertaken at the original sites by those who are themselves reincarnations of the originating ancestors. These persons are 'of the same substance' as the particular creative beings who, in the beginning, sang the particular songs and took the particular action. Strehlow illustrates with an account of kangaroo rites that he holds are characteristic of all Aranda increase ceremonies (Strehlow 1964:732-8; 1971:278-80, 305-12, 598).[8] He identifies various symbols. For instance, ceremonial artifacts are male or female 'principles'; the down, stuck to their surfaces, symbolises male and female secretions respectively; and the ritual is a symbolic enactment of sexual intercourse (Strehlow 1964:737; 1971:314-5).

While elements of mime are no doubt present, at the same time notions of symbolisation are not satisfactory because from beginning to end an element of reality, or believed reality, is present. For one thing, those taking part must *be*, not merely symbolise or represent, reincarnations of the totemic ancestors who instituted the particular rite (Strehlow 1964:733). For another, the blood of these men, used in the preparation of artifacts and integral to them, is no mere symbol, but is held *to be* the blood or 'life' of the totemic

ancestor (Strehlow 1964:732-4; 1971:315, 598). The reality that Aranda inject into this belief is underlined by Strehlow. He records that after a man gives blood during one of these ceremonies, he remains at the ceremonial ground until the wound heals completely. Were he to return to camp and the cut to bleed again, in the presence of women and children, the man would be held guilty of sacrilege and killed accordingly (Strehlow 1964:734n). In addition to these beliefs there is another cogent reason for rejecting the idea of symbol. According to the Aranda, the tufts of down which are rubbed from the artifacts during ceremony 'turn into' living creatures (Strehlow 1971:314, 375). The result is that the action taken is not merely symbolically effective but functionally, physically so, and the so-called symbols turn into what they are said to represent.

A linguistic feature also supports the view that Aborigines do not themselves envisage symbolisation. Strehlow reports that Aranda do not speak of performing a ceremony nor of making ritual artifacts. Instead, the ceremony and the artifacts 'issue forth' (Strehlow 1971:357). Again, in rites of increase, the totemic ancestor is 'induced to emerge' (Strehlow 1965:140), a phrase very different from western notions of acting a part. While the Aranda forms could be conventional modes of expression, nonetheless they give some insight into Aboriginal thought and that thought favours reality rather than symbol.

Although superficially Stanner's account of Aboriginal ritual is very different from those of Elkin and Strehlow, he faces the same problems. His theory describes totemism in terms of symbolism, and three points are central. Common to them is the notion of pattern or order, and this reflects his account of the Dreaming. First, the 'doctrine of the Dream Time' emphasises on the one hand that everything came to be as it is now in a founding drama or dramas and that people must continue to live in accord with that original institution; and on the other hand that the dramas were significant primarily for the establishment of order—the relevance of one thing to another (Stanner 1965:214-5, 227).

Second, Aborigines interpret the pattern or design in the world about them as evidence of intent and as having significance for them. 'Nature' is thus a vast sign system and within this system the totems and totem places are individual signs (Stanner 1965:215, 227). Their function, or 'sign-function' in Stanner's terms, is to signify or represent the marvels to human observers (Stanner 1965:228).

Third, in ritual, in order to maintain and renew the observed design, Aborigines plait song and action and artifact together to form multi-dimensional patterns. These patterns are symbols. What the signs indicate enigmatically, the symbols also represent. Thus, through them Aborigines explain or interpret the signs (Stanner 1965:232-3). The function of the symbols, or their 'symbol-function' as Stanner refers to it, is to indicate or suggest or mediate 'to living men...all the signs, metaphysical realities and demands of action of the Dream Time' (Stanner 1965:233-4).

We have already questioned Stanner's interpretation of the Dreaming on which much of his view depends, and with it his presentation of ritual as renewal of design, but we have yet to consider the notion of symbolisation itself.

Stanner avoids any simple notion of imitation by focusing instead on signs and patterns and symbol, but while symbol-function may achieve no more than a passage of

ideas, the ritual itself satisfies or meets the so-called 'demands of action'. In other words, ritual, through which symbols are formed and signs explained, has an additional and material consequence: living people, living animals and living plants. Formation of the pattern, therefore, not only expresses Dreamtime verities, but conforms with them in such a way that it has a physically functional effect. Stanner himself refers briefly to this aspect of the rites. They have a stimulating influence on the spiritual potencies on which human beings depend for physical existence or life (Stanner 1965:218), and through them Aborigines effect the renewal of the 'sources and bonds of life' (Stanner 1965:237). Again, the idea of symbolising is inadequate to cover Aboriginal thought because the action taken is materially effective.

This same aspect of ritual affects also Stanner's view of totems as signs. While he notes that the living men who form the symbols are 'totemists' (Stanner 1965:232), he fails to take into account that as kangaroo men or emu men they themselves, in their persons, introduce the totem either into the symbol-forming process or into the symbol pattern itself. It is not any man from any totem who takes a particular action or part in ritual, but the kangaroo man or the emu man, or the goanna man. The signs, then, are integral to the symbols or to the symbolising process and, either way, are associated inevitably with producing a real and related physical result, goanna from goanna ritual, and so on. The totems then must be more than signs; if so, they may perhaps be linked in some way to causality.

Examination of the idea of symbol in the work of all three authors identifies, therefore, an inherent difficulty. From whatever stance we explain the rites of increase, however we describe the associated process and cause, we cannot avoid the fact that 'signs', 'symbols' and 'symbolisation' issue in the real. This notion conflicts with the accepted definition of symbol. As a result we cannot rightly use the term in describing rites of increase, and it probably should be avoided in describing other Aboriginal ceremonies.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In short, with this chapter we have attempted to determine what happens in ritual, specifically, the Aboriginal notions of process and cause. To do this we have examined the work of three authorities. The investigation has shown that in Strehlow's view both ritual process and ritual cause are magical in nature; that in Stanner's work the ritual process is one of symbolisation; but that for Elkin the *altjira* concept is central. Elkin holds that Aborigines by ritual means transform and reveal what already exists, if invisibly, in the Dreaming (*altjira*), and in the course of this process, they depend on a potency of that Dreaming. We have examined these contrasting views from the perspective of related Aboriginal beliefs, but in no case have we been able to reconcile the proposals with Aboriginal ideas.

From one perspective, we might conclude that our search of the literature has been unproductive. Nevertheless, by leading us to reject magic and symbol from the area of process and cause, our investigation has identified significant contrast with western

thought, although the content of the contrast is not yet clear. Two other positive gains are the confirmation of Strehlow's translation of *altjira* and the idea that perhaps totems themselves are somehow related to causality. Further, there are two epistemological categories that we have not yet considered, namely those of time and space. All of these things we carry forward into the next chapter.

NOTES

1. The current preferred spelling of Aranda is Arrernte. Strehlow uses the earlier spelling and since this book makes frequent reference to his work, in the interests of consistency his spelling is retained throughout.
2. While the ancestors were both male and female, in what follows the pronouns used are masculine.
3. Strehlow explains that the Aranda word *tjuruŋga* is used in reference to a wide variety of ceremonial items (he lists eleven), including objects, ritual and the associated myths and chants. Anthropologists generally have applied the term to the sacred objects of stone or wood that are stored in secret caves, that is, they use it for these items only. While the designation is correct, Strehlow points out that the limitation of meaning is not. He reserves the spelling *tjurunga* to give the restricted meaning, as is done in the present text, but uses *tjuruŋga* to give the wider reference (Strehlow 1947:84-6).
4. Taken from Strehlow's 1964 account which differs in some detail from that of 1947.
5. Alternatively, a totemic ancestor might throw a bullroarer charged with his life at the woman, or she might eat food impregnated with the ancestor's life (Strehlow 1964:730). Again there is no suggestion that ritual might play a part, but rather that the ancestor himself takes his own initiative.
6. The exclusion from this list of the concept of spiritual potencies may seem to be questionable, for it is significant for cause and for understanding the activities of totemic ancestors and of participants in ritual. But as we have seen, these potencies relate more to secondary than to primary cause. That last is located in ceremony. In other words, while they take some action themselves, initially they are the acted-upon (except the trail of life): human beings take the first action through the rites. As our concern is with this primary cause, the child-spirits and their like will not be pursued any further.
7. Gould's and Wallace's spelling is adopted here because they use the orthography employed by three generations of literate Pitjantjatjara and Yangkuntjatjara. This differs from that of Elkin and Berndt in the stops, replacing b, d and g with p, t and k.
8. While the rites must be performed at the original sites, this does not exclude their performance, at least in part, at other places. The account that Strehlow gives is of a rite that took place at Alice Springs although it is associated with the totemic ancestor of the Krantji soak (water soakage) which is some 130 km to the north. Since the rite was not performed in full he had to rely on Aboriginal descriptions for the final and most sacred act (Strehlow 1971:307).

3

An Alternative View

BASIS FOR LOGIC

Since culture is a set of coordinated ideas, since the concepts of any given culture are systematic, it should be possible to deduce the notions of process and cause if there is a firm conceptual basis from which to start. The basis posited in this chapter is found in Aboriginal concepts of space, time, totemism and *tjukurpa* (Dreaming).

In describing Aboriginal concepts of space and time, anthropologists have been wary of imposing ideas derived from western culture, but have attempted to come to terms with Aboriginal notions. There is general agreement among authorities regarding these concepts and the present author's observations confirm their work. In the light of this agreement, these concepts can be treated as reliable expressions of Aboriginal thought. In another area of conceptualisation, that of totemism, Aborigines group together a variety of items that from the western perspective are dissimilar. While authorities differ in respect of detail, they all agree about the practice itself which is a well documented feature of Aboriginal totemism. The two epistemological categories of space and time, the Aboriginal totemic groupings, and the concept of *tjukurpa* provide the necessary base from which to start deduction.

Experience suggests that the procedure will not impose an alien logic or system of logic. Aborigines use the same logical structures as whites although evidence supports the view that traditional people commonly use abstractions of a lower order than those often favoured by Westerners—a separate issue that will be addressed in due course.

The proposed investigation accords also with Elkin's statement in his study of Aboriginal philosophy. He writes:

> I very quickly realized in my field-work that the Aborigines explained and argued points by what was to me quite logical methods. I could and did disagree with their major premise, but not with the inferences drawn from it (Elkin 1969:87).

In this chapter, therefore, we first establish the basic concepts and then proceed logically from that base.

Time and the sacred

Aboriginal conceptualisation of time is difficult for Westerners to grasp and is rendered more difficult in the absence of a generic word for time itself. W. H. Douglas writes that he has not found a Pitjantjatjara word to cover it, that is, no 'term meaning "time" as such' (Douglas 1978-1979:329). Stanner, in a broader context, says the same:

he has not found an Aboriginal word for '*time* as an abstract concept' (Stanner 1979:23), but a time-related element of meaning is present in the Aboriginal concept expressed as *tjukurpa*.

This term confers an eternal quality on anything to which it is applied and that includes ritual and all associated with it, such as myths, songs and sacred sites. While both Stanner's and Elkin's presentation of the concept of Dreaming is unacceptable, if they can be allowed for a moment to speak for themselves, the eternal quality embedded in mythology can be shown in both accounts. As Stanner has it, while the original dramas took place long ago during the Dreaming (his Dream Time), this past is not over and gone; in a sense the Dreaming is still present for it is not located '*in* time' (Stanner 1979:23-4; 1965:214-5). This same characteristic is shown also in Elkin's account (1969:88) of the Aboriginal concept: 'Like the dreaming of sleep, it [the Dreaming] is not limited by considerations of space and time, for all space is here and all time is now'. Although these authors differ in their interpretation of the *tjukurpa* or the *altjira* concepts, the eternal dimension of time, instead of its chronological reference, is a feature held in common.

Strehlow makes a related yet rather different statement about conceptualisations of time. Writing of Aboriginal totemism, he records that in religious or sacred contexts Aborigines do not make a division between eternity and time. They adhere firmly to the idea that there is no such division, a view that Strehlow suggests is their specific and important contribution to religious thinking as a whole (Strehlow 1970:132).

Another author who links ahistoric time with ritual is R. M. Berndt. He refers, for instance, to 'mythic beings' who themselves are eternal and to 'mythological or sacred time. . .existing alongside secular time but not identical with it' (Berndt 1974, fascicle 1:8). As Douglas points out, one difficulty is to say this without using the word 'time' (Douglas 1978-1979:329), a difficulty experienced not only by Berndt!

In a study of Pitjantjatjara and Walbiri (Warlpiri), Nancy Munn describes 'ancestral time' and contrasts it with time of the present and immediate past. In effect, she does away with chronological time by conceiving the integration of impermanent beings into permanent features, such as rocks. While linguistic evidence overturns her thesis (Bain 1978-1979:308-26; see also Douglas 1978-1979:227-30), her work, like that of others, shows the importance of time for understanding Aboriginal thought and again that ahistoricity is central (Munn 1970:144).

Maddock proposes a version that is significantly different from that of other anthropologists, retaining only the concept of chronological time. Writing about Aboriginal cosmology, he treats the Dreaming as belonging to a period or era now long past and by so doing eliminates its eternal aspect. At the same time he writes that the totemic ancestors (his 'powers') still exist today, although they are usually invisible. In harmony with this he concludes that the Aboriginal world view postulates 'a metaphysical discontinuity, a duality between men and powers' (Maddock 1982:105 ff.). This leads into a discussion of two kinds of existence, that of human beings and that of totemic ancestors. As a result of these differing types of existence people are

> unable ordinarily to experience the powers. . .If men could experience powers in the ordinary

> ways in which they experience themselves and other creatures, there would be not two kinds of existence but one only, that of beings located finitely and tangibly in space and time (Maddock 1982:105).

Developing his idea Maddock then posits two kinds of experience: the ordinary, adequate for communication between human beings, and the extraordinary, necessary for communication across the metaphysical barrier. The gulf, however, between human beings and totemic ancestors remains.

Maddock does not consider the possibility that the Dreaming might be outside chronological time. If that were so and people acted within that time reference, it would do away with the existence barrier that separates them from the totemic ancestors. Similarly the barrier would be removed if the totemic ancestors were to become finite (the suggestion that Maddock rejects above). Instead, without any discussion, he treats the Dreaming and all the Dreaming events as if they were located in historic time only. This idea is integral to his account of creation, yet he quotes Strehlow who stresses the eternal. Maddock, therefore, while quoting Strehlow's work in illustration, gives no argument to justify his reversal of Strehlow's view, nor does he refer to other writing to support his own. There is much evidence to contradict Maddock's assessment of temporality, yet without it, his subsequent presentation of Aboriginal world view would be difficult or impossible to sustain. Nevertheless, his work shows again that the category of time is critical for an understanding of Aboriginal cosmology.

Three main points emerge from the above discussion:

- the eternal aspect of the sacred and its freedom from chronological time (endorsed by all but Maddock);
- that this accords with the translation of *tjukurpa* which also accents the eternal;
- the significance of ahistoricity for Aboriginal cosmology and for understanding Aboriginal religious thought and action.

Space and the sacred

Next is the category of space. There are two main dimensions to consider. As with the category of time, we can again learn from Elkin, although we have rejected his account of the Dreaming concept itself. According to him, the Dreaming is limited neither by time nor by space, as the quotation above shows. To illustrate the nature of Aboriginal spatial concepts, he describes a hero who is transformed into a rock here and wood there—or again, maybe a part of him only is so transformed. In every case, each of these geographically dispersed elements is the hero himself, his complete self, and each has also the full Dreaming potency (Elkin 1969:88).

Strehlow says something similar: while a totemic ancestor may be transformed at more than one site, there is no suggestion that he has been fragmented; rather he is present in each manifestation—rock, tree or *tjurunga* (Strehlow 1947:28-9).

Describing Aboriginal totems, Stanner gives a different example in which both space and time are irrelevant, but he notes difficulties for western understanding:

> Aboriginal thought is possibly best expressed by saying that all and any members of a species, variety, or class are 'the' totem without respect to space or time. Not *this* eaglehawk or *that* crow, but all and any eaglehawks or crows that were, are, or might be. One can but acknowledge the difficulties in that statement. A European, thinking with European concepts and using European words, must do what he can to phrase and grasp the Aboriginal conception (Stanner 1965:228).

In all of this Aborigines appear to lack interest in spatial considerations, but in other contexts geography is vitally important, a feature that is well attested in the literature. For instance, particular totemic ancestors moved about particular country, undertaking specific activities in specific places. Paralleling this, certain individuals and patriclans are linked spiritually with certain areas, sites, myths and totems. This is shown, for instance, in conception totemism and in the specific part played by each participant in ritual. (See, for instance, Elkin 1979:169, 175-81, 222; Strehlow 1964:728-34; 1965:121 ff.; 1970:92 ff.; Stanner 1966:10; Meggitt 1962:58 ff.).

In sacred affairs, therefore, there appear to be two dimensions of space. For one of these, specific location is significant but the other is not subject to particular location in space nor to chronological time. In short, how Aborigines treat the spatial domain depends on the context.

Classification: Aboriginal totemism

An additional feature related to space is that of form. As shown in the previous chapter, Aborigines often appear unconcerned about material form so that both in mythology and in everyday affairs they sometimes refer to or treat things that are physically dissimilar as the same, such as a totemic ancestor and a rock, or they associate specific human beings and specific natural species or natural objects. These associations are termed 'totemic' in the anthropological literature. They are noted frequently by authors and give rise to an important basic question: what is the nature of the association or grouping?

In accounting for the totemic grouping, there are two main possibilities: either it depends on factors that have to do with Aboriginal understanding of the universe, of how it operates, and of his/her place within it; alternatively, the association rests on factors that are recognised as socially determined. In the first case, the relationship between 'members' of a group would be real in Aboriginal eyes, that is, grouping or distribution into classes would occur in virtue of conceived intrinsic physical and/or spiritual characteristics. Such features would be common to all within a group but would mark them off from members of one or more other groups. In the second case, Aborigines would view the association as largely a matter of convention, not attributable to something inherent but accorded by the members of society in conformity with recognised social rules or conditions.

If we are to understand what is conceived to be happening in ritual, both with regard to process and to causality, the basis for grouping is an important issue, one that is associated with Aboriginal totemism. Something of this has been set down in the previous chapter but a few additional points are necessary to provide a basis for what follows.[1]

Central to Aboriginal totemism are two interrelated ideas: that people and nature are united, and that an individual or group of individuals has a relationship with a portion of nature, not with nature as a whole. Such a portion, a plant or an animal or a natural object, is referred to as a totem. When members of an Aboriginal community recognise more than one form of totemism, it follows that individuals have more than one totemic relationship (Elkin 1979:165-8, 172, 186; Berndt & Berndt 1977:231 ff.).

Anthropologists have classified totems, and the associated totemism, from various perspectives. Two of these classifications, often adopted by other anthropologists, were suggested by Elkin (Elkin 1979:167-8, 172; Berndt & Berndt 1977:232, 238; Stanner 1965:225). The first is based on organisation or the manner in which totems are distributed within a community. It identifies such forms as sex, moiety, clan and local totemism. The second classification, which often coincides with the first, depends on function, both social and psychological, and results in a different list including social, cult, conception and classificatory totemism.

The totems recognised by any one Aboriginal community do not cover everything visible in the world but, in Stanner's phrase, the set 'roughs out a significant world within what is perceived' (Stanner 1965:227).

The range of items is wide and, as well as plant and animal species, includes many pests; Stanner lists items such as wind, stars, tools, cold weather, tide marks on the beach, parts of the human body and diseases such as a cold (Stanner 1965: 226). In some forms of totemism, for instance sex and conception totemism, the relationship is with one totem only, but it need not be restricted to one, as in classificatory or multiple totemism (Elkin 1979:185-6, 229-30; Berndt & Berndt 1977:232-8).

Aborigines use a variety of criteria to determine an individual's totems, each of which is appropriate to the form of totemism in question, for instance sex, site of birth or the site where quickening occurs, patrilineal or matrilineal descent (Elkin 1979:168 ff.; Berndt & Berndt 1977:231 ff.). As far as is known, an individual cannot in some way earn a totem but neither can he/she reject the particular totemic relationship (Stanner 1965:229-30).

Authors do not agree about the nature of the relationship between totemite and totem; that is, Aborigines group together items that are different in form, but authors are not agreed about the basis of the association. One who writes directly on the subject is Stanner:

> To say that Aborigines 'have' or 'possess' totems is wrong. They themselves do not speak—and probably do not think—of the relation in that way. European language makes problems here. . . The nearest one can come to Aboriginal thought is to say that a totem is *of* a person, a sort of property of his spiritual, physical and social constitution. Even that is not clear enough. Body, spirit, name, shadow, track, *and* totem and its sacred place are all within the one system. They all imply each other. (Stanner 1965:229)

While this may pose difficulties for western conceptualisation, as Stanner again acknowledges, he does draw attention to an association that in some sense is physically or spiritually real, an innate relationship of some kind. This view is supported by his description of the totem-totemite (his 'totemist') connection as 'substantial and essential' and again by his report that Aborigines often speak in terms of a physical association of human being, totem and totem-site. On the other hand, in accounting for the grouping he writes that totems are 'ascribed', a disposition by public agreement in accordance with

recognised rules and conditions. In this context he is careful to avoid the idea that the guidelines reveal what the totem already, inherently, is. Instead, he accents the role of society in what he refers to as the 'acquisition' of totems (Stanner 1965:229-30, 232). This explanation favours the idea of a relationship socially determined and ratified rather than the alternative, a grouping of person and totem based on actual, inherent association through acknowledged physical or spiritual relationship. Stanner, therefore, in a careful assessment, finds both innate and socially ascribed aspects to the grouping.

The work of Strehlow points to an intrinsic association of totemite and totem and also, in another area of grouping, of totemic ancestor and totemic species. In Aranda mythology the bandicoot ancestor, while human in shape, *is* an actual bandicoot; likewise, the kangaroo ancestral sire *is* a kangaroo. At night time he assumes human form but by day appears as the living animal who eats grass and other plants. Giving a number of examples, Strehlow stresses the *absolute* identification of totemic ancestor and totemic species. Aranda use this feature in verse in which they refer to the ancestor either by name or as the species with which he is identified, a shift in terminology that is common also in mythology. These same features are not restricted to the mythological accounts and to verse, but are found in everyday life. For instance, an individual is *completely* identified with his totem: a man who before birth received his soul from the bandicoot ancestor regards himself as the reincarnation of that ancestor, bandicoots are his brothers, and he is himself a bandicoot (Strehlow 1947:15; 1971:181-2). Also in Strehlow's work, as we have seen, the totemic plant or animal as well as the individual originates from the totemic ancestor, all of which suggests specific and inherent connection between a person and his totem.

Elkin takes the view that in Aboriginal thought the life of humankind and of nature is one; that people and nature are of the one order; and that they share a common life (Elkin 1979:166, 186, 228). This view implies an innate relationship of totemite and totem, something physical or spiritual, but Elkin does not show, perhaps cannot do so, what the nature of that association or grouping might be. As we have seen, his description of the Dreaming is unsatisfactory, but for the moment note that it probably accounts for the absence of specificity in this instance, which could well be linked to Elkin's description of the Dreaming as the source or ground of all that exists. In the light of this he is unable to say, with Strehlow, that the spiritual potencies originate *from* the totemic ancestor. Instead, in his account the various heroes (and heroines) by ritual and spiritual action, and using Dreaming potency, distribute or leave pre-existent spirit entities at spirit centres. As a result, Elkin can account for a relationship between totem and totemite but from the narrative or organisational perspective only. He can give the form but not the content of the association. We can observe this restriction in his account of conception totemism and other forms, such as local cult totemism, with which it is associated (Elkin 1979:170, 184-5).

Classificatory totemism opens up an alternative facet of grouping. This kind of totemism, writes Elkin, is often associated with that of cults and depends on the view, noted above, that the life of humans and nature is one, or that men and women and nature are of the one order. In classificatory totemism Aborigines classify people and the whole of the significant universe into the social groups. By this means they bring nature into their own social, moral and psychological system, personalising and humanising it. This practice

provides Aborigines with a basis on which to determine their behaviour towards nature and on which to rest their expectation of it, giving them the confidence with which to meet the affairs of every day. Stating this, Elkin gives the example of Aborigines who group together the people of a patrilineal clan, the species kangaroo (primary totem), grass, water and the Pleiades (subsidiary totems). In this case, the men and women of the clan, the species and natural objects are all of them kangaroo (Elkin 1979:186, 230; 1969:90). Sometimes totem sites also are included in the classification (Berndt & Berndt 1977:237-8). In this type of totemism, Elkin establishes the form of relationship but again does not show its substance. Instead, he writes that the principle underlying classification is not clear, although he takes the view that such a principle(s) exists or existed (Elkin 1979:186, 229).

Elkin, therefore, accents the unity of humankind and nature, or better, of specific persons and specific parts of nature, their totems. But neither in respect of origin, for all have a common source in the Dreaming, nor in respect of classification does his work suggest the nature of that unity. He gives form to the relationships, which he demonstrates abundantly, but not content. Instead, he directs attention away from totems to totemism and gives two classifications, one based on social groups and the other on social function. In this context he introduces a different type of association, referring to totems as symbols: symbols of a cult group; of the hero associated with that group; of the life of the species for which men of the group conduct increases rites; and of the 'common flesh' of members of various matrilineal social groups (Elkin 1979:173 ff., 228).

Contrasting with these authors, Maddock notes the diversity of items grouped together by Aborigines, but in accounting for it he barely refers to Aboriginal totemism. Four ideas are central to his account. The first of these is mentioned above: his fixation of the Dreaming in time and his separation of Aborigines and totemic ancestors. Next, he completely separates people and species. This separation, he states, has its roots in Aboriginal accounts of the very beginnings when, in the Dreaming, the undifferentiated became differentiated, a process that occurred on several planes. One of these planes was that of species, another that of society, and a third that of the land. Co-incident with this differentiation, specific parts of the land and particular species and social groups were permanently associated. Maddock describes also a variety of social groups. Aborigines, he writes, recognise patrilineal and matrilineal clans and further divide society into classes such as patrimoieties and matrimoieties and sections. Last, he takes the view that, having a 'passion for order' Aborigines extend the classes by using them as a basis for classifying both species and totemic ancestors (Maddock 1982:35-6, 81, 95-6, 105-6). From this perspective, in the absence of a common factor between the planes, Maddock can examine the natural classifications (and a grouping of species identified from linguistic markers) without considering human beings at all. He looks, therefore, for physical similarity among the species of a class and for differences between classes, but while he demonstrates a tendency to order, there are many difficulties and anomalies. Further, he finds that the classifying base, that is the system of social order, is distorted on extension to the plane of species and distorted again when applied to that of ancestors (Maddock 1982:96-7, 117-8).

As these brief accounts show, there are two aspects to Aboriginal grouping, that of natural fact and that of social fact. By his interest in the physical and spiritual, Strehlow has accented the first, giving both form and content of the totem-totemite association. This

approach sets the stage for consideration of the human role within the natural universe. Elkin introduces both aspects of grouping. On the one hand, he speaks of natural fact, of the common life shared by human beings and nature. On the other hand, by his emphasis on social and psychological function he brings nature into the social universe, accenting social fact. But for both aspects he accounts only for the form of association, not the content. Stanner also hovers between the two perspectives. In his work the content of the relationship is social in character, for the totem is ascribed in accord with socially accepted rules and conditions. But he also recognises an association of totem and totemite that is substantial and describes a totem as 'of' a person, a kind of spiritual, physical and social property. Maddock writes solely from the social stance. He places society and nature on separate planes of existence and seems to imply that the grouping of people and nature is classification for classification's sake.

There is no doubt, then, that in grouping items together, Aborigines show considerable disregard for physical form, but the ideas that underlie the practice are not easily determined and different authors account for them in different ways. Nonetheless, although Elkin and Stanner both make much of the social aspect, the common thread of natural fact is present in the work of these two authorities and in the work of Strehlow. In their several ways, either by reference to the physical, or spiritual, or common life, each implies an inherent factor that explains why Aborigines unite themselves and nature. Strehlow identifies also an association of totemite and of totem with totemic ancestor. All these authors at least imply, or write in terms of, some kind of innate factor or element or characteristic common to 'members' of a group. On the other hand, Maddock dissociates humankind from both nature and ancestor. We can, however, take issue with him as we did in his account of the Dreaming, for again he does not substantiate his view, neither theoretically nor with examples; yet the work of many authors, including that of the present writer, contradicts him. Ultimately, Maddock's view does not agree with what Aborigines themselves say, and we will leave the last word with them, for their perspective is our goal.

A number of examples has been given above, but the following support the view that Aborigines themselves conceive an intrinsic link between individual and totem, and also between individual and totemic ancestor. First, three examples show the relationship of totem and totemite. For one thing, an Aborigine refers to his social totem as his 'flesh', a close association that is the basis for social behaviour since he does not kill or eat his 'flesh' (Elkin 1979:173; Berndt & Berndt 1977:238). Again, referring to his totem an Aborigine will say 'one flesh—one Spirit—one country—one Dreaming' (Stanner 1965:226). Next, a report from Stanner parallels Strehlow's bandicoot example (above): an Aboriginal envisages the woollybutt tree and his brother-in-law as some kind of 'oneness' or 'unity'; this tree is his brother-in-law's totem and he will say that it *is* his brother-in-law (Stanner 1979:25). Further, Strehlow records that a man proved the possum was his totem on the grounds that male possums are commonly found with some reddish-gold fur and he had a patch of light brown skin on his back (Strehlow 1964:731).

Second, three examples show the grouping of totemic ancestor and individual person. An elderly but childless man told Strehlow that he had many sons and daughters. These were born to him as a result of his action long ago when he was the native cat ancestor of Kolba (Strehlow 1947:11, fn.). In the next example, according to the mythological record,

the ancestor kangaroo had his leg broken. A man who was believed to be the reincarnation of this ancestor referred to the injury, claiming that it explained why he was unable to run as fast as other men (Strehlow 1947:133). Finally, a Pintubi guide advised Strehlow against drinking the water of a particular soak. This was because a man believed to be the reincarnation of the totemic ancestor of that soak had been speared to death not long before. Strehlow implies that this occurred elsewhere but the guide said that the water was no good; that it stank because there was a dead man in it. They therefore filled their canteens at another soak about sixteen kilometres distant (Strehlow 1970:139, note 27).

Most of these examples show that the relationship of individual to totem or to totemic ancestor is the basis for behaviour and sometimes also for reasoned argument, supporting the idea that Aborigines conceive a physically or spiritually real basis for the association. We conclude that Aboriginal grouping is based (implicitly) on inherent, natural factors. This idea leads to a further conclusion. Since Aboriginal classification is totemic in nature, and since it depends on innate characteristics, then these last are themselves totemic in nature.

Summary

We have now established a conceptual foundation, some features of the Aboriginal epistemology, and have a base from which to start our logical deduction. But before commencing, in order to consolidate this foundation, we set down what we know in summary form. The evidence so far shows that:

1. Physical existence and/or life requires sustaining by human beings;
2. *Tjukurpa* functions as an adjective. It incorporates also (a) an existential element, something verbal in the sense of 'being', and (b) the concepts of eternal and true;
3. In Aboriginal religious thought historic, ongoing time is irrelevant—the sacred is not subject to it, but is perpetually significant now;
4. In Aboriginal religious thought there are two aspects to space: in some contexts the sacred is not limited by spatial considerations, that is, space is irrelevant or unbounded; but in other sacred contexts space is divided into specific unchanging areas;
5. Aborigines group together physically dissimilar items, classifying them in virtue of some totemic feature that is innate, or inherent.

While reporting some of these points, authorities do not use them in a coordinated fashion. Sometimes they interpret Aboriginal statements and mythology in terms of their own concepts, as in the matter of grouping, or they do not treat time in sacred affairs as ahistoric. Instead, at least implicitly, they use the chronological perspective. Other difficulties arise over the conceptualisation of process and cause. When considering these concepts, authors appear again to rely each on his own conceptual system, seemingly without considering whether or not the ideas fit with other related Aboriginal concepts. They thus introduce notions such as magic, imitation and/or symbolisation. As a result, the

thought and practice attributed to Aborigines is inconsistent or contradictory.

In an effort to avoid pitfalls of the type described, we intend now to accept literally what Aborigines say and the points so far adduced. From that base we will attempt to derive an internally coherent Aboriginal epistemology, a set of basic Aboriginal concepts that is consistent with Aboriginal practice. This base can be contrasted with western notions with a view to explaining misunderstandings between Aborigines and whites.

At this interim stage of the enquiry we do not yet fully understand the underlying basis for Aboriginal grouping, for their classification of items. Nevertheless having regard to the concepts noted above, we can set out a number of characteristics of the groups themselves, or 'unities' as they will be called, using Stanner's term. These characteristics are:

1. Unities transcend form (shape) and include physical items (people and nature) and mythological ones (totemic ancestors);
2. Since in significant areas of thought Aborigines treat time as ahistoric, unities span chronological time;
3. Since from one perspective space is unlimited but from another is divided or patterned, these features are reflected in unities;
4. Unities are totemic in nature.

LOGICAL INSIGHTS

Cosmology

In the light of these features, a number of elements of Aboriginal belief and practice become clear. First, because in ritual the eternal is paramount, human dependence on totemic ancestors disappears as does the link through totemic ancestor to totem. This occurs because in ritual Aborigines *are* 'ancestors': the 'actors' in the ceremony *are* the ones whom they might be said to portray. We have noted that in Aranda ritual the ancestor is 'induced to emerge' (Strehlow 1965:140). Second, in the unities we have a set of transcendent groupings that take in the whole significant detail of heaven and earth, without respect to historic time. Within this cosmos, all members of the Aboriginal community have their place, their role and relationships, and society is constituted. As an inhabitant of that world the Aborigine reaches into an area of thought that the Westerner can grasp conceptually but is unable to adopt, for it uses a conceptual system that contrasts with his own. For the Aborigine, however, people act in ritual in their ancestral, totemic and cosmic aspects in a process for which the passage of time has no significance.

Nevertheless, if Aboriginal thought unites what western thought divides, the reverse is also true, and in this the division of space is important. The Aborigine, considering the activities of totemic ancestors, can make a distinction between the ancestor as he is here and as he is there. For the Westerner, an individual as he moves from place to place is the same individual. So he is for the Aborigine, but with this proviso: in his creating, cosmic role he wears a number of different hats and these are associated with specific places and

the action he takes there; something is made here and something is done there. As a result, the individuals who are born of this ancestor are likewise specific relative to place and to ancestral activity. Consequently, they can be contrasted with other individuals who are of the same totem but connected with a different part of the hero's saga. Such considerations determine also a person's role in certain rituals: in one ceremony kangaroo men of different locality and ancestral action may be contrasted, yet in another all kangaroo totemites may contrast with emu.

This cosmological statement is useful for providing a general, if brief, account of what happens in ritual, but it does not address the specific questions about process and causality, and to those topics we continue to direct attention.

Dominant mode of thought: human beings as model

In pursuing our enquiries we take a lead from Stanner. He writes that in understanding the world and themselves within it, human beings sometimes develop a '*dominant mode*' of thinking. This phenomenon has occurred in the West when principles and categories have been developed in the context of 'religion' and 'science' but have then been applied to a wide variety of data; the principle of evolution is one example. Stanner holds that the same kind of thing happened in Aboriginal thought, but instead of turning to the material or metaphysical worlds for a model, Aborigines looked to the social, to society (Stanner 1979:33-4). From this they derived principles and relations and applied them more generally; for instance, they took what Stanner refers to as the 'male/female social principle' and applying it to the non-human world, developed sex totemism. Again Aborigines took the 'principle of relatedness itself', the 'relatedness between known persons of known descent through known marriages', and extended it to cover the whole social universe. As a result, kinship terms appropriate to close affinal and agnatic kin were used for everyone with whom the individual had contact (Stanner 1979:34).

This basic proposition of Stanner's is useful: that in the course of understanding the world within which they live Aborigines have developed a dominant mode of thought. On the other hand, his identification of society as the basic explanatory model is less helpful. Instead, it is preferable to work from the assumption that, effectively, Aborigines use a model drawn from themselves, from interacting, communicating, living people. Such a model appears implicit in Aboriginal belief and action. This proposal is in keeping with our finding that Aborigines group people and species and objects in terms of believed natural fact and not in terms of social fact. As we have seen, the relationship between members of groups is regarded as real and of physiological or spiritual origin. Stanner's work, by contrast, tends to favour a grouping based on social fact, and his proposal of a dominant mode of thought based on society is in harmony with that view. The alternative, the use of human beings as the model, agrees with the basis of grouping accepted here because it emphasises the natural instead of the social. Further, the principles that Stanner advances, such as the male/female social principle and the principle of relatedness, are not fundamentally social but physiological, again supporting the 'natural' option. For these reasons, it is better to take human beings, living people, as the model, both in their

physiological and psychological aspects. With this model in mind, we can rewrite and extend Stanner's proposal. There are two main points to note, classification and process.

Classification

Aborigines have taken a physiological pattern, the known relatedness of known kin, and have applied it throughout the whole social universe. In addition, they have used this pattern as the basis upon which to classify the cosmos, that part of it significant to them. The physiological model provides, therefore, the basis not only for kinship classification but also for unities, and so also for the different forms of totemism. Male/female relatedness becomes the basis for sex totemism, the link between agnatic and affinal kin becomes the pattern for moiety totemism, and further division of known kin becomes the basis for section and sub-section totemism. It is important to note also that specific physiological relationship is of the order of 1:1. Either it is present or it is not. Percentages cannot come into it; thus, moiety contrasts with moiety, patrilineal clan with patrilineal clan, totemic unity with totemic unity.

Process and causality in ritual

Aborigines have also taken activity peculiar to the living, activity recognised as physically or psychologically effective among human beings, and have used that as a model of process and efficient cause.

All day long, in any society, people are in contact with each other; they work together, they talk together, and almost by definition the basic process that characterises their meeting is that of interaction. Aborigines appear to recognise this feature in their own daily living. And knowing it to be effective in secular affairs, they take it as the model for effective sacred ceremony. From this perspective, they can be seen in ritual as engaging in a process of interaction, a process that is associated with some kind of interactional causality. The other possibility is to posit that in ritual Aborigines see some kind of causative action and reaction. Support for the first proposal is available from several sources. Elkin writes that Aborigines do not conceive a 'chain reaction of causal events', and he associates this mode of thought with the Aboriginal concept of time (Elkin 1969:93). Empirical evidence also accords with the idea, for in ceremony appropriately related individuals or groups of individuals play complementary parts, clan with clan or moiety with moiety, and a type of communication results. Further, this complementarity or reciprocity is a necessary element. Among Western Desert Aborigines it is present in rites attended by women only, in those attended by the whole community, and, as many report, it is a feature also of men's ceremonies, a patterning that in each case extends also to seating arrangements. Moreover, as a matter of logic interaction is ahistoric, but action and reaction presuppose ongoing or chronological time. Since sacred time is ahistoric, the only process appropriate to ritual is interaction—a type of communication that, by definition, is simultaneously bidirectional.

We can say then that ritual action is interaction, but it is interesting also to consider

who or what it is that is involved in that process. Men, of course, take part, but in the sacred ritual context they act not simply as human beings but rather in terms of their totemic identity as 'members' of unities, for instance, as kangaroo men or emu men. In other words, not only people but the totemic unities are involved in ritual process. From this vantage point, we see that in ritual Aborigines act for creation as a whole, undertaking a process of interaction not merely between groups of human beings but between cosmic, totemic unities. They do this being themselves integral to those unities.

This proposition is essentially different from that of Lévi-Strauss. His work centres on a model *for* communication and on a homologous series of differences—a grid derived from nature (Lévi-Strauss 1966:75, 115, 124). The present proposal is a model *of* communication as it occurs between parties who are related in specific ways, a process derived from human beings in action. Further, Lévi-Strauss postulates a fundamental separation between man and nature, a characteristic necessary to his theory (Lévi-Strauss 1966:115, 135). By contrast but in accord with repeated Aboriginal statements, the unities cut across any such conceived boundary, and it is these groupings that provide opportunity for more detailed analysis of causality.

Causality and abstract concepts

Unities are derived by grouping or classification. As we have seen, the pattern for this procedure is derived from recognised physiological relatedness, but while that provides the form or structure for classification, there is more to find out about content and process. In respect of content we do have some information. According to Aboriginal ideology, there is an inherent characteristic, some innate, totemic factor, that is common to all 'members' of a group, and this property distinguishes them from 'members' of other groups. What else can we find out?

Another insight from Stanner is useful. This author discusses Aboriginal grouping and takes the example of a group incorporating body, spirit, ghost, shadow, name, spirit-site and totem. In some contexts, Aboriginal thought enfolds these notions into a 'oneness' or 'unity' but in others makes a clear distinction between them (Stanner 1979:25). Stanner notes the seeming contradictions in the above but, almost in passing, adds an important comment: that the Aborigine's 'abstractions do not put him at war with himself' (Stanner 1979:25).

This notion of abstraction is valuable. Stanner does not develop the idea but it is probable he refers to the abstract unity itself and not to the process by which that abstract entity is derived. For this study, it is the second possibility that is helpful and we take it up now, extending Stanner's original thought. From this perspective we can say that unities are derived by a process of abstraction: that in effect or at least by implication, Aborigines identify a property or feature, one not available to sensory perception, in virtue of which the 'elements' of a group are the same. In so doing, they accent what 'members' of a unity have in common. Consequently at this abstract level, the difference between units such as a person and a rock disappears. Likewise the difference between animate and inanimate vanishes (so much for magic). At the same time, at the level of the concrete, each unit is or can be conceived as a manifestation of the unity, that is, of the abstracted whole (cf.

Stanner, 'They all imply each other', quoted above). Implicitly, therefore, Aborigines abstract common, totemic properties such as crow-ness and eaglehawk-ness, properties in virtue of which all crows or all eaglehawks are regarded as the same; yet each crow is also a manifestation of the unity Crow, as each eaglehawk is a manifestation of the unity Eaglehawk (after Stanner). Or again, they abstract kangaroo-ness, the property common to a patriline and various natural species and phenomena, all of which are the same in respect of the unity Kangaroo (after Elkin). At the same time, each individual person of the patriline, each creature or any concrete element from that unity, is a manifestation of it.

In respect of these various abstractions, at least by implication, Aborigines adopt the same procedure as Westerners according to whom a kilogram of nails is the same as a kilogram of feathers, or of anything else, in respect of weight. Moreover, it could be that the Aboriginal abstractions are comparable, perhaps functionally comparable, with the properties of matter abstracted by Westerners. In another area of similarity, the totemic properties, while remaining implicit, are abstract nouns that can function also as adjectives (cf. weight and the related 'light/heavy'), for they characterise that to which they are applied. Nevertheless, while they form the basis on which units are grouped, the same abstraction is not always used. Units are not always classified according to the same criteria. The Aborigine can retreat, as it were, from any particular single level abstraction and regroup the units according to another totemic property, as a Westerner might group by volume or by weight. As a result of this, in one type of rite Aborigines may be classified into a group with totems appropriate to local totemic clans, yet in another, along the lines of moiety.

All of this is significant for establishing efficient cause. If ritual is effective through the interaction of totemic unities, then, first, these groups have a functional aspect that operates in ritual. Second, this functional aspect is a key feature of the property according to which units are grouped and a unity determined. Third, such a property is specific relative to goal and the result or product can be understood with reference to it. If this be so, then the totemic property is the basis of efficient cause, confirming earlier suspicions; again, a parallel is present with western properties of matter. In other words, Aborigines abstract according to totem or totemic property and thereby make up the 'membership' of unities. Since classification of units is goal-related, this abstracted property bestows on a unity the capacity for specific communication, that is, for specific, functional, interactional doing. Further, one such causative element alone is not sufficient for interaction to occur. Instead, it must meet its 'opposite number' or relatum; then, interactional doing is possible, drawing on interactional efficient cause.

Efficient cause is thus rooted in a causal interactional process and can be described in terms of related 'pairs' of totemic properties. These last are the spiritual and sacred properties of paired unities between which interaction is effected. Such properties cannot rightly be described in terms of the animate/inanimate or the personal/impersonal dichotomies for, at one level of abstraction, they are not restricted by such notions. Furthermore, quantification is not merely irrelevant but contrary since these properties, as well as the communicating unities that bear them, relate to each other as 1:1. By contrast the properties of matter abstracted by Westerners are quantifiable, opening the door to an infinity of complex relationships between them. Nevertheless, comparison of these two

types of property is in order since the features abstracted by both Aborigines and Westerners are at the root of causality.

This idea of comparing western and Aboriginal concepts is interesting when the composition of the unities is considered. As observed above, at this level of abstraction Aborigines do not distinguish between people and matter, between living and non-living. The Aboriginal totemic properties are equally the properties of persons, of species and of the inanimate universe, while their western counterparts are properties of matter. This does not invalidate comparison of the two sets of abstractions for they appear to occupy, if not perhaps fill, similar conceptual and causal slots in their respective conceptual systems. It must be noted, however, that in some contexts Westerners also do not distinguish between animate and inanimate, for instance, when using the property of weight in calculating the load of an aircraft. Nevertheless, in critical respects, in these totemic unities Aborigines have grouped what Westerners divide, and this has massive consequences for a further understanding of causality.

Recent and in part unpublished work of Wallace exemplifies and confirms this analysis. Wallace has worked extensively in Central Australia with the Pitjantjatjara and people of related dialects, Aborigines of the same linguistic and ceremonial grouping as most of the residents of Aputula. That is significant if we are to apply the theoretical findings to the Aputula material.

Referring to aspects of Pitjantjatjara world view, Wallace[2] observes that *kurunpa* 'spirit' is the effective element in ritual, and it is interesting to note its qualities. Firstly, *kurunpa* is spiritual in nature, contrasting with the physical. Reflecting this, the basic translation 'spirit' is often used, as we have done, but other renderings are sometimes given. For instance, Wallace prefers 'spirituality' but accepts also 'life essence', adapting a term of Mountford's (Mountford 1976:53-4). Again, *kurunpa* is always specific in respect of totem. Accordingly Pitjantjatjara do not envisage mere *kurunpa* but always specific, totemic spirituality, such as that of kangaroo or of honey ant. This life essence is the animating element of persons, animals and plants and has its origin in the totemic ancestors (Wallace, 'spirit ancestors'), whose 'substance' is pure, unadulterated *kurunpa*. Thus the fig and kangaroo ancestors are the source of fig and kangaroo spirituality respectively.

The concept of *kurunpa* is of central importance in Pitjantjatjara belief. Wallace notes that the life essence is present at sacred sites, left there by one or other totemic ancestor, and present also in the tracks along which he or she passed; again it is found in people, animal and plant species and, for instance, in rocks and in sacred objects of the ancestor's totem. At the same time, *kurunpa* can be independent of the physical, occurring as child-spirits or as the life-cells of species. At death a person's spirituality leaves him permanently, and later, after appropriate ceremonies, it is received by another person of the same totem as the deceased, for instance, the son or daughter or someone else who is willing to accept it. The *kurunpa* then becomes part of the receiver's spirituality. There is much in common here with accounts of comparable lively elements reported by other authorities (Elkin 1981:221-3; 1969:87, 91; Stanner 1965:218; Strehlow 1947:17; 1964:729-32).

Last, Wallace reports that as well as being the effective element in ritual, *kurunpa* is significantly affected by ceremony in two respects: for one thing, the life essence is released by ritual (as other authorities report, for instance, of spirit-children and life-cells

of species), and for another, ceremony strengthens the spirituality present in individual and totem. Some more detail is available on this final point. As we have reported and described above, in the course of ritual those taking part assume complementary roles. Wallace also has noted this, but in addition he notes that reciprocity of action is important even when one person alone is involved. This occurs, for instance, in rites of increase in which an individual exercises his responsibility by caring for a sacred rock or rocks of his own totem. In each case, there is an exchange of *kurunpa*, either between participants in ceremony or, as in the case cited, between person and rock. As a result of this exchange, the spirituality of each becomes stronger (Wallace 1977:84; 1990:58-61; also personal communication).

Limiting ourselves now to those points that are of immediate concern, we see that *kurunpa* is:

- totemic and spiritual in nature;
- common to people, plant and animal species, and the inanimate;
- the effective agent in ceremony, operating through a bi-directional process in which participants take complementary roles.

As this discussion shows, Wallace describes a life essence or spirituality that is causative in ritual, and he identifies certain characteristics. By contrast, through careful logical assessment the present study identifies epistemological concepts, the conceptual building blocks that underlie causality in ritual. These are sacred, totemic spiritual properties that characterise human beings, plant and animal species, and the inanimate, and they are effective through a process of interaction. The description coincides with Wallace's account of the characteristics of *kurunpa*. At the level of world view, his empirical data exemplify and confirm the theoretical, logical and epistemological analysis. First, Wallace's material endorses the description of interactional process; second, it confirms that the abstracted, totemic, causal properties are located in the non-physical component, the *kurunpa*. In short, Wallace adds colour and form, drawn from a specific world view, to our black and white epistemological outline.

As well as this, the excursion into empiricism endorses the idea that epistemology and world view are systematic and confirms the use of logic in the elucidation of causality. We continue, therefore, the theoretical investigation of cause and process in Aboriginal ceremony, writing in terms of abstracted totemic properties.

The nature of ritual events

Classification has opened up some aspects of causality, but there is more to unravel through a better understanding of process. As we have argued, neither magic nor symbolisation is appropriate to the Aboriginal conceptual system, but we must now seek an alternative. Although these possibilities have been rejected, the efficacy attributed to magic spells, and the associated imitation, provides a useful lead through which to approach the subject. Strehlow has noted that Southern Aranda rely heavily on mime in ceremony (Strehlow 1947:76), but the Northern Aranda use poetry and highly stylised action (Strehlow 1947:56-8). Either way, through an art form, something of the original

event or desired result (Strehlow 1971:284) is spelled out—expressed in deed or word. Taking account of Aboriginal concepts, we can not treat this practice as imitation or spell or symbolisation. The alternative is to accept literally what Aborigines do, as we have already accepted literally what they say, and thus to construe the action as an actual expression or instance of that which is portrayed. From this stance, in ceremony living people manifest the real occasion in one form or another. Ritual interactions set forth a creative occasion; they constitute the event.

This interpretation agrees with the view that historic time is irrelevant and that accuracy in detail is vital. It also agrees with the proposition that the abstracted property on which grouping rests has a functional aspect. In ritual, therefore, the effective and creative occasion is conceived to be there, manifested in one of its forms, effectively occurring in what might be termed its eternal and cosmic aspect. This suggests an abstraction and grouping in the verbal sphere that parallels and is associated with that already identified in the nominal. In song, for instance, an event is described and the actions are also performed. Effectively, causatively, the desired event occurs. This process could be the reverse of the prohibition on the use of the name of a deceased person. 'Don't call him up', as Aborigines say. In ritual, by contrast, the desired is 'called up' and, what's more, by name (see p. 22). In this way the occasion of its presence is perpetually maintained and a continual physical expression is expected. The necessity to keep up ritual practice, to look after the country, to perpetuate ritual well-being and to ensure the supply of game is well-known.

Ritual interaction contrasts with western notions of causative action since only the appropriate people may undertake a rite. They are integral to it; the correct interacting wholes must be present. This belief will tie certain ceremonies to land as part of that whole, and it will tie roles to specific persons. For whites, physical action is effective no matter who takes it, for reasons inherent in the natural world and the properties of matter as conceived by physics. For whites, therefore, Aboriginal ceremony will appear to show an element of imitation, but for the Aborigines that is not so.

This Aboriginal view may be for the Westerner a 'false science' in the sense of failure to recognise correctly the laws operating, but it is not magic, nor is it symbolisation. Instead, we have the real thing, accurate in detail: the appropriate interaction expressed in an appropriate form by appropriately related parties, and further manifestations of the 'named' are expected. In other words, the interaction deemed causative is undertaken, the wheels oiled, as it were, and the perpetual presence maintained, with the result that the desired objective in physical form is expected. This procedure requires a set of abstractions and categories that contrast with those of western epistemology.

Aboriginal ritual and refinement of the model

While Wallace's work with *kurunpa* supports the account of causality, the question now arises: is the simple concept of interaction adequate to cover Aboriginal ritual in general? Application of the notion yields a two-fold result: first, its confirmation, and second, opportunity to refine and develop it, that is, to gain further insights into process and

cause. This goal is achieved by building on the basic interactional model using other processes of the same type, processes peculiar to and known to be functional among the living. Living people, people in action, still provide the central model.

The usefulness of the basic model, effective interaction between people, is shown best in rites termed historical by Elkin (Elkin 1979:180-1) but commemorative by Strehlow and Stanner (Strehlow 1971:349 ff., 377; Stanner 1965:231). These ceremonies are undertaken by appropriately paired, opposed groups of Aboriginal people to commemorate mythological events. That is the explicit purpose, or final cause, of the rites, but as Elkin points out, historical rituals and those of increase provide also an occasion in which beliefs, social behaviour and traditional living are affirmed. These rites strengthen people as individuals and as members of society (Elkin 1979:180-1). The idea is valid as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. Instead, these mythologically based interactions promote not merely a state of psychological, and thus social, well-being but a sacred, spiritual and cosmic well-being that is echoed in the physical world. This view gains some support from Strehlow. He writes that commemorative rituals, along with those of increase, ensure supplies of game and other foods, and the well-being of the community (Strehlow 1971:343). Historical rites, therefore, can be said to maintain the 'health' of people, of plant and animal species and probably of the cosmos. This product, or final cause, is achieved by a sacred and spiritual interaction between opposing groups. And since human beings are integral to unities, we can make the broader statement that this final cause is achieved by a cosmic, causative communication between totemic entities, an event that is not subject to ongoing historic time.

The model is equally appropriate for ceremonies of increase in which the interaction is similar in type to that of historical rites, but two additional points are relevant. Firstly, as we have seen, the criterion for interaction is the presence of appropriately paired wholes, unities that relate to each other as 1:1. The irrelevance of number shown by this statement affects conceptualisation of the process and of the product, both of which are unquantifiable. As a result, the increase is conceived in terms of flow but not an unending flow, for the communication must be continued or maintained lest production dry up. Thus humankind and the universe are sustained. The second point concerns the separation of lively particles during the rites. It is better to consider this topic when examining the third type of rite, that of initiation.

The purpose or final cause of initiation ceremonies is to raise the status of a novice to that of a mature male. Various models have been advanced for these ceremonies. Since initiatory rites are undertaken by opposing groups of affines, the communicating model is again suitable and also the idea of interactional cause. It is preferable, however, to modify the plan, making it more specific to these rites. This modification is possible by drawing on another interactional process characteristic of and peculiar to the living, namely procreation.

The possibility that initiation rites might follow a pattern of death and rebirth has been explored by I. M. White. She supports the view, firstly, that Australian Aborigines generally did not emphasise physiological paternity, and secondly, that insufficient attention has been paid to the place of this feature in Aboriginal social life, both sacred and profane. This is not to suggest that Aborigines dissociated intercourse and childbirth;

rather that intercourse was held to be necessary but not sufficient. It is essential, writes White, to recognise and to give place to both these elements of Aboriginal thought (White 1970:25-6). After an exhaustive search of the literature she advances the hypothesis 'that men credited women with the sole power to give bodily life while claiming to themselves the power to create spiritual life' (White 1970:25).

In support of this proposal White quotes a number of writers: Ashley-Montague, Roheim and Bettelheim, all of whom hold that blood letting in Australian rites is a symbolic menstruation; she also quotes Berndt who notes the explicit statement in mythology of this view. Roheim bases further interpretation on the Oedipus complex. Bettelheim suggests that in Aboriginal rites, men's power and importance, relative to that of women, is stressed and that in initiation ceremonies men perhaps declare their ability to 'bear children'. White agrees with this and considers two aspects of 'men's power to procreate in the spiritual sense', the second of which is significant here. Initiation ceremonies, she holds, symbolise death and rebirth; in these rites there is a ceremonial killing followed by return to life in which initiates are reborn as adults through the procreative powers of men (White 1970:26).

While the idea of symbolisation has been challenged, White's further notation is valid: that after death, novices are reborn through the agency of men as adult males and that this is a type of spiritual birth.

The process of initiation rites can thus be described in terms of begetting or procreation, an initial interaction between affines, followed by birth of a mature male. Such an individual is a viable, spiritual being who with others of his patriline is capable of interaction with men of the opposite moiety, with men who on interaction with his fathers and brothers gave him spiritual birth. Communication between moieties results, therefore, in rebirth within the patriline, but without the agency of women. Wallace's work supports this interpretation. Following him we might say that according to the Pitjantjatjara world view, spiritual birth is the birth of a person whose substance is not flesh but spirit, one whose spiritual 'substance' is totemic life essence or spirituality (*kurunpa*).

Hiatt also has considered the procreative model and brings out a further parallel with birth, noting the final ceremonial separation of son from mother whereby the novice becomes a man (Hiatt 1971:79-80).

This notion of separation from the one who gives life is a model taken from parturition. We can see it in the birth of the spiritual male following ritual interaction of affines, a spiritual birth following spiritual congress. We see it again in the release of child-spirits and life-entities when, during rites of increase, particles of dust are ground from the surface of a rock held to be the transformed body of an ancestor. The same separation occurs with the scattering of feather down from ritual decorations during rites. In these examples, after preliminary and effective interaction, the begetting or physical separation theme is worked out. In each case, something essential, vital and spiritual is 'handed on' or remains in the 'product'—initiated male or tiny particle of rock or feather. Each is separate but spiritually 'alive' or, in the Pitjantjatjara world view, each is endowed with *kurunpa* (totemic, spiritual 'life essence').

The theme of procreation, associated this time with growth, another characteristic of the living, is worked out in further ritual procedures. During initiation a novice receives

spiritual sustenance from touching a ceremonial living object and again when he is anointed with the blood of a totemic ancestor. A man also receives spiritual enrichment when for the first time he touches an object such as a particular *tjurunga*. In each instance there is a one-way 'flow' of virtue from object to individual that bestows on him greater spiritual worth. Pitjantjatjara world view supports this. As Wallace recounts, 'life essence' is conceived to flow into the individual, indeed the flow may be so strong that it might harm him. For this reason, he is urged to place his hands quickly on the ground that some may flow out and spill into the earth. Wallace further maintains that after the first time, and there is a first time with each item, the sustaining 'flow' is two-way to the mutual benefit of totemic ancestor and totemite (see above). Two differing aspects of the one whole, they interact to the benefit of both; and without this interaction both will wither, even die (Wallace, personal communication). Other authorities record a one-way benefit, that is from rock or artifact to totemite. Wallace's statement is to be preferred since it is in accord with oft-repeated statements by Aborigines that the country must be cared for; something must be done to benefit it. It would seem that on the first occasion, the initiate's 'interactional muscle', or in Pitjantjatjara terms *kurunpa*, is conferred on him, as the mother confers bodily flesh on the foetus. But after this, the 'muscle' is strengthened by use in interaction, to the mutual benefit of both self and partner, without whom interaction is impossible. Additional exercise in interaction thus promotes strength and general well-being, a requirement of the living for which rites other than those of initiation provide added opportunity, for instance, historical rituals.

Before concluding this examination of Aboriginal rites, it is appropriate to comment briefly and tentatively on mortuary ceremonies. Both Elkin and Stanner associate these rites with those of initiation. Elkin suggests that initiation is modelled on mortuary ceremonies as a death and rising (Elkin 1979:198). Stanner finds metamorphosis, with a model of sacrifice, present both in initiation and mortuary rituals (Stanner 1966). Further, it is significant that the procreative model used by White involves death and rebirth—a variation on the same theme. In other words, mortuary rites, like those of initiation, involve passing from one type of life to another, something conferred by interaction between moieties: death, followed by birth to something spiritually or physically different. Maddock's account of *bolung* is relevant here. The Dalabon hold that a woman conceives when the *bolung* as a snake enters her body. This snake either is or becomes the spirit of her child. On death and after appropriate rites by opposed patrimoieties, the spirit returns to the water, again as *bolung*, and is able to be incarnated yet again (Maddock 1982:115, 153). The essential feature for the argument is that the interactional model, drawn from the living and involving death and rebirth and interactional cause, appears to remain valid.

In summary, process and causality in all major rites are interactional. This basic communication model is associated in initiation ceremonies with that of procreation: a spiritual interaction followed by spiritual parturition. This last, separation of the new born from the one who gives birth, is found after preliminary interaction, both in initiatory rites and in ceremonies of increase. Well-being and spiritual strength are promoted by exercise of interactional muscle or, in other words, by keeping up communications between groups. In all of this, living people in their dealings with one another have been a valuable model.

It remains only to reconsider final cause, to summarise ritual action, and to collect together the associated basic set of concepts for comparison with those of western culture.

Final cause: purpose of rites

This work accepts the final cause suggested by the names of the three types of rite examined—historical, initiatory and increase—but in addition there is a final cause common to all rites. It relates to the ontological assumption from which this discussion arose, namely that according to Aborigines, physical existence and/or life requires maintenance or sustaining by human beings. In accord with this, humans have a creative and sacred role to play, one that is usually associated by anthropologists with increase ceremonies only, but initiatory and historical rites also focus on creation. Further, if we can generalise from Maddock's account of the Dalabon, then mortuary rites have the same general purpose and for the same reason, that people must take spiritual action to ensure their own survival.

This creative preoccupation is clear from the summary below:

- In **historical rites** Aborigines maintain or perpetuate acts of creation and institution (establishment of social practice) and contribute to the well-being of the living and of the universe.
- In **increase rites** Aborigines sustain themselves, other living species and the universe.
- In **initiation rites** Aborigines beget spiritual persons who, by cooperation with others, are capable of creation; these creative purposes are achieved when they take part in historical and increase rites and in initiation and mortuary ceremonies.
- In **mortuary rites** Aborigines return the spirit of the deceased to its original state, ready for further incarnation.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This investigation of Aboriginal thought has yielded, first, a basic and cohesive set of concepts that explains causality and that is appropriate to all major types of rite. We can now describe what is happening, and why and how things work. Next, although not a primary concern, the enquiry has produced an integrated account of the principal rites. In accord with their ontological assumption, the major ritual concern of Aborigines is creation (final cause), and in taking up this responsibility, they act in their spiritual, cosmic and eternal role as totemic ancestors. Last, their physical, psychological, profane and interacting selves, both male and female, provide the model for process and efficient cause, and in addition, relationship within the family provides the pattern for classification.

The elements of Aboriginal epistemology which we have identified in this chapter are listed below.

Concepts directly to do with causality

final cause:	creation/procreation sustaining and renewing universe
efficient cause:	rooted in causal totemic properties
causal process:	cosmic interaction between appropriately related pairs of abstract entities—unities
properties of matter/ humankind/species:	totemic properties causative relate to each other as 1:1
unities:	cosmic groupings of entities each includes human beings and parts of nature classified on the basis of inherent totemic property relate to each other as 1:1

Other epistemological concepts

ontological assumption:	physical existence and/or life requires sustaining/ renewing/creating by human beings
time:	ahistoric
space:	not limited, unless the place of particular ancestral action is significant and the site integral to the ritual
tjukurpa quality:	anything that bears *tjukurpa* quality (including actions) simply exists, eternal and true

Here is an interlocking set of concepts and categories of thought that is basic to Aboriginal knowledge and knowing. The next step is to contrast the set with western ideas. The expectation is that by observing differences a way will be found to understand the Aboriginal-white encounter. Two features are of particular interest, one of which is a general contrast; the other takes up specific content.

First, examination shows that the Aboriginal set as a whole is characterised by abstractions that are linked directly to reality: while unavailable to sensory perception, they nonetheless retain a direct link with the real. Some western concepts, on the other hand, use further degrees of abstraction. This general contrast can be shown by examining the more specific notions that underlie the conceptualisation of cause. In Aboriginal ritual contexts, these notions are the interactional process; the totemic, causal, spiritual properties;

and the 1:1 relationship between properties. While none of this can be perceived through the senses, all concepts are linked directly to the actual here and now. In other words, according to the Aboriginal world view the abstract concepts used to explain ritual cause require one step only from reality. Among Westerners, causality is explained in terms of an ongoing process of cause and effect, the physical properties of matter, and the relationships between properties. These last are complex and can only be stated through the use of quantification and mathematical formulae. In this case, in order to understand causality, abstractions break the direct link with the real. Quantification, unnecessary in Aboriginal world view, is necessarily integral to the western conceptual system.

This is a helpful summary, showing a difference in the degrees of abstraction that characterise Aboriginal and western conceptual sets. However, the contrast is central to our argument and thus warrants a closer look.

More than once when describing the totems, Stanner observed that Aboriginal ideas are difficult for Westerners to grasp. The same is so of the conceptual set before us. In order the better to appreciate it, it is useful to review the evidence quickly, linking concepts with Aboriginal belief and practice.

We observe first that many of the sacred concepts identified derive directly from well recognised features of Aboriginal ritual. The well known rites of increase and overt statements from Aborigines (for instance, about caring for the country) support the view that physical existence and/or life need maintenance by human beings. Related to this, the final cause of the rites is also well documented, and the general creative purpose is clear.

Further, the opposing groups in ritual and their 1:1 relation vis-a-vis each other are matters open to observation. These features, with an ahistoric concept of time, support the notion of interactional process. Other concepts have been well documented in the literature, those of time and space and the *tjukurpa* or Dreaming concept. While there are considerable differences of opinion about this last term, which we have found is descriptive in type, there is general agreement that it refers to what is eternal and true.

Whether or not Aborigines consciously recognise all these things is a different matter, particularly in the absence of relevant vocabulary, such as words for time and space. We must assume that some notions remain implicit although Aboriginal ritual behaviour conforms with those underlying ideas. The same is so of much of western behaviour in everyday life which likewise conforms with the world view but does not often draw overtly on the underlying concepts and basic assumptions. For instance, the operation of a motor vehicle is understood, as a rule, in terms of its parts, but a more detailed account could be given involving the properties of matter.

In addition to these concepts, we have listed also causal, spiritual, classified groups or unities and the casual spiritual properties that are the basis of the classifications. In respect of the unities, the various Aboriginal totemic classifications are widely reported, as are relevant statements from Aborigines. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that these groupings are overtly recognised, and further, since participants in ritual take totemic roles, that Aborigines see nature, or what Westerners refer to as nature, as involved also.

On the question of the causal spiritual properties, there is no evidence to suggest that Aborigines recognise them. On the contrary, in this study, where the western enquirer sought relevant, if implicit, properties of matter as a basis for classification, Pitjantjatjara

Aborigines turned instead to two concepts, that of *kurunpa*,' spirituality' or 'life essence', and that of *tjukurpa*, 'Dreaming'. Since the one totemic ancestor is the source of the life essence that 'members' of a classified group have in common, it is this spirituality or life that is the overtly recognised basis for grouping. Further, Stanner rightly points out, Dreaming is the Aboriginal answer to every question of why and how. In other words, while Aborigines attribute what happens in ritual to a spiritual element and while they recognise its characteristics, including that it operates in certain ways, they have not further analysed why and how things happen.

We cannot claim, therefore, that Aborigines recognise the totemic properties as abstracted properties of matter. On the other hand, they do recognise them in a kind of descriptive or adjectival sense, as the account of the life essence shows. Both of them, the properties we have identified and the spirituality, are totemic, spiritual and causal in ritual. Both function through a process of interaction in which opposing elements are complementary and relate to each other as 1:1.

This then is the basic set of concepts through which Aborigines understand the world and their place within it. In comparing the set with that of Westerners, we note the difference just shown in the approach to understanding, the Westerner seeking basic properties, the Aborigine looking elsewhere. That contrast draws attention to a general difference in the two conceptual systems.

From the Aboriginal perspective, the world is to be understood by looking at 'wholes', entities visible to sensory perception. Paralleling these things, Aborigines have conceived a spiritual counterpart. Why things happen is attributed to Dreaming; in effect, things happen as they do because it is their nature so to happen. A moment's reflection will show that Aborigines abstract directly from the physical to a spiritual reality and, importantly, that the resultant concepts retain a direct link with the concretely real.

The direct link with physical reality is shown in a number of ways:

- by the conceived nature of ritual events. In ceremonial activity, Aborigines give actual expression to what might be said to be portrayed and through this process have a direct effect on the working of nature. What happens is not the result of a chain reaction of cause and effect but straight from spiritual to natural event (maintenance of the physical and/or life.)

- by Aboriginal classifications, both those of the kinship system and the totemic groupings. 'Members' of all these classified groups are specific people or particular natural species and inanimate items.

- by the conceptualisation of ritual causality. *Kurunpa* is itself causal and is specific with respect to totem. Causality can also be explained by reference to causal, spiritual, totemic properties (implicit).

- by the 1:1 relationship shown between the interacting unities. These groups relate directly to each other and not through complex mathematical formulae.

As these points show, the direct link with the world of the senses is retained throughout and is evidenced by the conceptual set identified and listed above.

Westerners, on the other hand, often direct attention away from wholes. Instead they analyse what they can see into component parts and seek properties of matter. They explain what happens through chain reactions of cause and effect or through these properties. While these last may themselves be linked directly to the real, as in notions such as weight, nevertheless their relationship to each other must be expressed through complex mathematical formulae. These, while describing in mathematical terms what we hold to be real, nonetheless require considerable abstraction from the world of the senses, for instance, $E=mc^2$.

In a word, abstractions of the conceptual system and the world view used by Aboriginal people appear to take one step only from what can be accessed directly through the senses, whereas western abstractions often break that link. This constitutes a major and general difference between Aboriginal and western thinking.

It might be argued that the above comparison is not justified since we compare Aboriginal spiritual notions with western physical ones. While that is so, what interests us here is not the conceptual content but rather the nature or degree of abstractions, and those are as we have described. In the light of this we can say that at least in the area examined, the analysis shows a major contrast between Aboriginal and western concepts and categories of thought: Aboriginal abstractions retain a *direct* link with reality but western abstractions do not. It is important to stress that this tentative theoretical finding does not reflect upon Aboriginal cognitive capacity. All it says is that in the area examined, Aboriginal and western concepts contrast in respect of degree of abstraction used. Cognitive capacity is a different topic, a subject that is addressed briefly later.[3]

The second contrast between Aboriginal and western conceptualisation takes up the notion of process. This notion is important in understanding how people interpret the social events in which they take part. We have seen that Aborigines recognise social interactions; that they emphasise those between specific kin; and that in ritual contexts, where people act as 'members' of unities, nature is included in the interactions. Western ideas differ in two respects: first, while white society recognises interactions between kin, many social dealings occur also between people who are not kin; second, Westerners do not conceive nature as involved in social interactions. These contrasts suggest another fruitful area of investigation.

We now have two contrasts in Aboriginal and western conceptual systems, two possible tools through which to examine the meeting of Aborigines and whites, and so perhaps a means of explaining losses in communication. If culture is a set of coordinated ideas, then we might expect first that in other areas of Aboriginal thought, abstractions would retain the direct link with the real; and second, that the Aboriginal interest in interactional process might be shown not only in sacred but also in profane contexts, such as in economic affairs. We might expect also that these things would be manifested in language and in the conceptual content accorded to communications and events. Nevertheless, when we look at everyday affairs, if we are to recognise a contrast in the degree of abstraction used, then we must be able to identify thought that is linked directly to concrete reality and also thought that severs that link. To describe these things is the next concern. Later, having established a contrast based on degrees of abstraction, our first

explanatory tool (chaps. 4, 6, 7), we will then consider the difference between Aboriginal and western notions of process (chap. 8), contrasting Aboriginal use of interaction with western use of transaction. This examination will provide us with a second tool through which to interpret the Aboriginal-white encounter (chap. 9).

NOTES

1. There is a wide and comprehensive literature on the subject of totemism. Those interested might read Elkin 1979; Strehlow 1947, 1964, 1965, 1970, 1971; Stanner 1966, 1979; Berndt & Berndt 1977; Berndt 1974; Meggitt 1962; Maddock 1982. The index of most general accounts of traditional Aborigines will provide multiple references; see also bibliography of Elkin's work in Berndt & Berndt 1965:455 ff.
2. Wallace made his comments in the course of conversation after he had read the draft of this text. The material is given here with his kind permission.
3. Under the heading 'World view and abstractions, cognitive skills and Piagetian theory' (chap. 10).

4

The First Explanatory Tool: Contrasting Degrees of Abstraction

PIAGETIAN THEORY

How might thinking that is limited to one degree or one level of abstraction manifest itself? What are its characteristics and what content is appropriate to it? What distinguishes it from thinking that uses further levels of abstraction or what limitations does it impose?

A framework suitable to these questions is available in developmental psychology. Of particular value is the writing of Jean Piaget; nevertheless, his interests and those of this study are complementary rather than identical.

Piaget's primary concern is to understand cognitive functioning in the adult, specifically abstract reasoning. Since it is difficult to observe the processes of one's own thought, he approaches the subject by tracing the development of abstract thought in the growing individual. His concern, as psychologist, is with the structure and process of cognitive growth, and he follows it as the child develops by examining the content of cognition and discerning the associated cognitive skills. These last, the patterned data and skills upon which Piaget's theories of cognitive functioning are built, are invaluable to the anthropologist. In a word, while his interest is cognitive structure and process, ours is the cognitive content that provides evidence of the presence of particular structure.

Several factors influence cognitive growth. Piaget makes the basic assertion that, in addition to the physiological processes of maturation, growth occurs through interaction between the individual and the natural environment. This is a major plank of his theory, which is psychobiological in nature, but he recognises also that sociocultural factors, those of interpersonal social interaction and those of educational and cultural transmission, will have an effect (Piaget & Inhelder 1969:114-19; Piaget 1974:299-309). Notwithstanding, he does not explain what that effect might be.

While Piaget holds that the processes of cognitive development are coordinated and continuous, in practice he finds certain broad stages or levels, each of which merges rather suddenly into the next. These various levels present definite features; thus they can be described, compared and contrasted. Each stage is characterised by specific cognitive structure and associated skills that an individual must attain before he moves to the next level. Each stage, therefore, carries implications for the thought of which the individual is capable, both in respect of processes or skills used and the content to which these are applied. This is significant for the individual's representation of reality. If, for instance, content is tied to the concrete (one level of abstraction), so also is logic and so, necessarily, is the cognitive structure on which cognition depends (Piaget & Inhelder 1969).

In tracing cognitive development Piaget limits his investigations, by choice, to the child's growing understanding of the physical world and to his/her increasing competence

in reasoning about that world (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:4). His description of structure and process, therefore, is a general one, but the model that he uses has aspects of specificity. This comes about because it takes up, although implicitly, something of the culturally acceptable world view, something of the conceptual universe and epistemology. This topic is of great importance to the anthropologist.

Stages in cognitive development

Some features of Piaget's theory (Piaget & Inhelder 1969) and related terminology are given in Table 1 and in the description that follows. Piaget notes two main stages in cognitive development, two main levels of cognitive structure, process and thought, each of which is subdivided again.

Table 1. Piagetian stages in cognitive development

pre-operatory	sensori-motor semiotic characterised by cognitive structures known as action schemes
operatory	concrete formal and combinatorial characterised by cognitive structures known as operations
Increasing refinement and coordination of cognitive structures at any one stage leads on to development of the next.	

Initially, the child's representation of reality focuses upon his/her own body and actions. During the pre-operatory sensori-motor stage, with increasing differentiation of objects and with growing internalisation (mental representation of his universe and himself relative to it), this egocentric orientation begins to be corrected through a process of decentring, and the child starts to be an inhabitant of the world. As part of the process the infant becomes aware that objects exhibit constant form and size, that is, in a critical discovery, he begins to be aware of constancies within his experienced world. In Piaget's terminology, a baby starts to be aware of invariances but, as yet, only of those that are directly available to his senses. Concurrently with these events, the infant starts to structure time and space, although at the sensori-motor level they are no more than a heterogeneity of spaces and times centring on the individual. Cause also lacks coordination.

The semiotic pre-operatory stage follows, during which the world is still largely centred on the self, but further decentring occurs. At this level of cognitive growth the individual continues to depend mainly on perception, on what he can perceive through the senses, but he begins to expand his experience through symbolic play, drawing and deferred imitation. With the development of language, he begins to be open to other people's ideas or representations of reality, but cannot yet coordinate these with his own.

Space, time and causality are further defined, but this last leans to final cause and to realism. At this stage also the psychical and physical are not yet separated; for instance, children sometimes describe thought as a kind of voice.

At the next level, operatory thought begins and there is a major shift from centred to decentred thinking and deductive logic becomes available as a tool of thought. Reliance is no longer on perception alone. Previously, by use of the senses, the individual could note constancy in size and form, but now the child no longer relies exclusively on this evidence and, through action taken, logically discerns a constancy not available to sensory perception.

An example helps to make this theoretical statement clear. As noted, Piaget chose to show the development of abstract thought and logic by examining an individual's growing understanding of the physical world or of 'facts of nature' such as the properties of matter. Accordingly, he devised tests to determine the logical use of abstracted notions such as quantity, weight and volume. One of these, that for quantity, provides the illustration.

The individual is given three glasses: two identical, A and B, and one different, perhaps taller and narrower, C. The child pours water into A and B until the levels are equal and notes that they hold the same amount of water. He/she is then asked to pour the water from, say, B into C. The pre-operatory child will say that the amount of water has changed: the water in C is not the same as that remaining in A. The operatory individual will argue that the water is the same. This last response shows that invariance has been extended beyond the perceptual domain, that despite difference in appearance the child has deduced a constancy present: he/she has been able by logic to abstract the relevant invariance, in this case that of quantity, and knows that the amount of water is still the same. Such a child shows ability in the conservation of quantity. This skill, ability in conservation, is a cornerstone in Piaget's demonstration of the development of abstract reason or operatory thought.

At the first operatory level, that of the concrete, the problems an individual can solve are still linked directly to the real or to imagined objects and events that he believes to be real. Deductive reasoning, therefore, is still linked directly to the actual (what can be perceived through the senses), as are the abstractions. To put it another way, the level of abstraction is one remove only from reality.

At the concrete level also the individual is capable of seriation (arranging things by magnitude—say length), and classification requiring the use of two dimensions at once. For example, in a multi-coloured bunch of flowers the child will recognise that there are more flowers in total than there are blue ones. These two cognitive skills are necessary for the development of number, which also commences at this level. As a first step, ignoring perceptual difference, the child can note the common factor—one dog, one cat, one tree—and logico-mathematical cognitive structures become possible. Space and time are further structured and, with the development of rational causality, or efficient cause, chance can be understood. In sociocultural concerns advances are made also. The individual begins to be able to coordinate his/her ideas with those of others. As a result, children play as a group instead of as individuals, and further, they can grasp interrelatedness, for instance that brother is brother to brother.

The formal operatory level of thought follows that of concrete operations. At this

stage, cognition breaks free from the concrete and finally combinatorial thought, the pinnacle of cognitive development, is used in representing reality. Now there is no longer a direct link between thought and what is available to the senses, and the principle of abstraction of invariances is reapplied at an increasing distance (abstraction) from the actual, that is, at an increasing distance from the immediately given here and now. A wide range of logic is opened up by retention of form but not of content. Classifications can now be classified; problems are solved by logic instead of by trial and error; ideas are combined with ideas opening the way to further logical possibilities such as 'if. . .then' and 'either. . .or'. Combinatorial thought is used with logico-mathematical thinking in proportions, probabilities, and other complex mathematical relations. Eventually thinking can be undertaken about thought. At this stage the psychical has been separated from the physical and, with thought escaping from the concrete, reasoning by hypothesis or proposition alone is possible. Interest also, freed from the now, can be reoriented to the non-now and future; it can be redirected from the real to the possible.

Writing of formal thought, Piaget and Inhelder sum up the characteristics that describe the transition from concrete operations to formal and combinatorial thinking:

> The concrete operations relate directly to objects and to groups of objects (classes), to the relations between objects and to the counting of objects. Thus, the logical organization of judgments and arguments is inseparable from their content. That is, the operations function only with reference to observations or representations regarded as true, and not on the basis of mere hypotheses. The great novelty of this stage is that by means of a differentiation of form and content the subject becomes capable of reasoning correctly about propositions he does not believe, or at least not yet; that is, propositions that he considers pure hypotheses. He becomes capable of drawing the necessary conclusions from truths which are merely possible, which constitutes the beginning of hypothetico-deductive or formal thought (Piaget & Inhelder 1969:132).

Discussion

This brief outline of orthodox Piagetian theory provides two elements of importance for the present enquiry:

1. The assertion that cognitive development occurs through interaction with the natural environment and through social interaction, that educational and cultural transmission also affect cognition.
2. The relationship noted between abstraction level and logic, with a description of thinking that is characterised by particular abstractions. These features are set out in the summary below:

Pre-operatory thought	abstractions depend on sensory perception; pre-logical
Operatory thought:	
Concrete	abstractions unavailable to sensory perception but linked directly to the concretely real: one step only from reality; concrete logic

Formal; combinatorial abstractions have broken free from the concrete retaining form but not content; formal logic

Point 2 gives a statement of ascending orders of abstraction and, to simplify subsequent discussion, the following terminology will be adopted. The world of the here and now, that is, whatever is available to sensory perception, will be referred to as reality. Abstractions not available to perception but still tied directly to the real will be referred to as first degree or first order abstractions while those that have broken that direct link will be termed second degree or second order abstractions.

The first point above warrants comment, in particular the influence of sociocultural factors on cognitive development. Piaget examines this subject in his article, 'Need and significance of cross-cultural studies in genetic psychology' (Piaget 1974). In that article he states that the individual coordinates his representation of reality with that of others through interpersonal interactions, by question and answer, discussion and argument. He further points out that these processes are common in all societies and that associated factors, while significant for cognitive development, will not result in cognitive difference in people of different cultures. Diversity, he suggests, depends on the influence of other factors associated with educational and cultural transmission. Nevertheless, these factors will not affect the operatory skills themselves but only their deployment (Piaget 1974:302-3). Piaget implies by this that the 'representation of reality' and the 'culture' are somehow not the same. Elements of the one are coordinated through interpersonal interaction, but those of the other are associated with a process of transmission. The same distinction is present also in the idea that factors associated with interpersonal interaction are common to all societies, but those associated with transmission are not.

The differentiation shown here between 'representation of reality' and 'culture' is an important feature of Piaget's theoretical assessment but is unsatisfactory. As this study accepts (see p. 13), and as the previous chapter shows clearly, culture is not rightly to be regarded as different from the representation of reality. Rather, that representation, the world view, and the conceptual system constitute expressions of culture: culture is inherent. Accordingly coordination of the representation of reality results in or results from educational and cultural transmission. These things are like two sides of the one coin and occur simultaneously through the process of interpersonal interaction. From this perspective, generalising from point 1, we can say that cognitive development results from interaction with both natural and sociocultural environments. To spell this out in more detail, cognitive development results from interaction with the natural environment both as it is and as it is thought to be by members of the culture within which the individual grows up—that is, in accordance with the culturally acceptable world view. This idea is present in the work of Piagetian scholars Seagrim and Lendon (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:197-8; 200-1), and it is in keeping with the interpretation placed on Piaget's writing by C. R. Hallpike (Hallpike 1976:255, 268).

We commenced this study of Piagetian psychology seeking a description of abstract thinking. Theoretical analysis of Aboriginal ritual had shown that to understand the world and, specifically, causality, abstractions of the first degree only were necessary. Since culture is a set of coordinated ideas, we suggested that this feature of Aboriginal thinking

might be reflected in other aspects of Aboriginal culture, such as language. We further suggested that if this were so, then since western thinking often uses abstractions of the second degree, this difference between Aboriginal and white thinking might help to explain cross-cultural misunderstandings. What we needed was to be able to recognise the lineaments of thinking that is tied to reality and to be able also to distinguish this thinking from thinking that is more abstract. Through this study of Piaget's writing we have now achieved that objective. Nevertheless, if we find that Aboriginal thinking is less abstract than that of whites, what then? Would such a finding be some kind of implicit comparison of, or comment about, Aboriginal and western cognitive ability? Psychologists have faced a related problem, one that has to do with Piagetian theory as such. Their work is of assistance to us in seeking an answer.

CROSS-CULTURAL TESTING OF PIAGETIAN THEORY

Piaget's objective was to advance a general theory of cognitive development, a statement that would be universally applicable, valid worldwide. Initially researchers tested Westerners for ability, and results were remarkably uniform; but cross-cultural testing showed significant variation. In addressing this finding psychologists have asked two main types of question, practical and theoretical, both concerned with Piaget's theory itself: first, 'Are methodological factors contributing significantly to test results?' or 'Are assessments reliable?'; second, 'Is Piaget's hierarchical sequence of stages the same cross-culturally?' and 'Is the timing of development the same everywhere?'.

In taking up these questions we follow the account given by Marshall H. Segall, Pierre R. Dasen, John W. Berry and Ype H. Poortinga (Segall et al. 1990:146-54). These authors describe briefly the considerable methodological problems that have affected cross-cultural testing and analysis but note also that difficulties have been partly overcome. Researchers in many cultures have been able to assess development at least to the level of concrete operatory reasoning, using the Piagetian categorisation by stages.

Concerning the theoretical issues, after much cross-cultural research the hierarchical succession of stages has been demonstrated in all cultures but, again, to the concrete operatory level only. On the other hand, real differences have been found in the timing of development, a variation that can be of the order of five to six years. In more extreme examples, some members of a particular population may fail altogether to show ability in concrete operatory reasoning, at least in respect of a given concept.

In examining these cross-cultural differences psychologists have compared performance and competence. They found that while subjects might have ability in concrete operatory reasoning, the capacity was not necessarily shown initially but only after encouragement. In demonstrating this, subjects were first tested, then given a short training session and afterwards tested again. When that procedure was adopted, the previously hidden competence emerged. In short, performance on a given test did not necessarily reflect cognitive competence. Findings such as these have led some psychologists to the view that all differences shown during tests should be assessed as performance phenomena or attributed to problems of methodology.

What is undisputed is that differences have been recorded in cross-cultural data. Observing this, other psychologists have questioned the suitability of a developmental model, such as Piaget's, on the grounds that it leads inevitably to the formulation of adverse comparisons.

Others again hold firmly to the view that value judgments are unwarranted and that differences in test performance should be treated as mere differences and that is all. This idea agrees with the ecocultural model employed by Dasen (Dasen 1975:158-9) who adapted J. W. Berry's (Berry 1971:328-9) original proposal. According to this proposition, society favours the development of the concepts, aptitudes and skills that are required by a given population in order to carry out the subsistence activities. In keeping with this framework Dasen predicted that operatory concepts in the domain of space would develop more rapidly in hunter and gatherer societies than in agricultural communities, while quantitative notions (for instance, weight and volume) would be attained more rapidly by settled agriculturalists than by hunters and gatherers. This hypothesis has been amply supported by empirical research.

Summarising the points thus far, Piaget's hierarchical succession of stages has been universally confirmed to the level of concrete operations, and only the timing of development has been found to vary cross-culturally. Some reasons for this have been given and supported empirically.

It is now appropriate to look at the level of formal operations to see whether or not that has been generally endorsed; we continue to follow the account of Segall et al.

Unlike the stage of concrete operations, that of formal operatory reasoning has not yet been fully confirmed. For one thing, research has shown that in western society formal reasoning is seldom used: that except in areas of particular interest, such as that of a professional specialisation, neither adolescents nor adults use formal operatory reasoning.

In the light of this empirical finding, Piaget altered his original stance. He suggested that formal reasoning is within the capacity of all adults but whether or not the ability is shown depends on the conditions, that is, it will be demonstrated only when they are favourable. While research has sought to confirm this revised statement, to date insufficient material is available for a conclusion to be drawn.

Discussion

Three findings are important for this study:

1. that people everywhere show the same basic cognitive skills, the same basic thought processes of concrete operatory thinking;
2. that in everyday affairs, Westerners rarely if ever use formal reasoning;
3. that conditions may affect the use of formal reasoning, although the proposal has yet to be confirmed or denied.

In other words, both Aborigines and whites use the same basic cognitive processes. Neither uses formal operatory reasoning in day-to-day affairs although Westerners may use it in their area of specialisation. On the surface of it, these first two findings cast doubt

on the validity of our proposal, that is, to explain failures in cross-cultural communication on the basis of contrasting degrees of abstraction. Nevertheless, the third point, if not yet proven, is still not disproven. Consequently, at least theoretically, the conditions of testing may inhibit the demonstration of formal thinking and if that is so, then methodological difficulty might affect the finding of point two above. Point one is unaffected: that stands.

It is helpful now to gather together three points. First we recall that the interests of this study and those of psychologists are not the same but complementary. For psychology, interest is in cognitive structure and process and specifically as it relates to the development of abstract logical thought. The concern, therefore, is to demonstrate cognitive capacity. This is done through appropriate tests under controlled conditions, accompanied, if need be, by a training session to bring out latent ability. By contrast, this study is interested in communication and, therefore, in the content of cognition. We seek this in the ordinary affairs of everyday living and specifically not through testing. The give and take of communication and the ebb and flow of community life and of cross-cultural encounters is the source of our data.

Psychologists and anthropologists are asking different questions. For their part, psychologists seek to show cognitive capacity, and it is this feature rather than cognitive performance that is their goal. For the anthropologist, whose interest is in daily communication, performance in that context is the main concern. Each, therefore, from his/her own viewpoint asks one more question than does the other, the psychologist about capacity, the anthropologist about abstraction and whether any cross-cultural differences in this area affect communication. For anthropology capacity is not at issue.

Second, psychological tests show, as noted, that in day-to-day affairs Westerners do not often use formal reasoning. By contrast, the author's observation is that they commonly use content that has broken the direct link with the real, including second degree abstractions in logical constructions. The alternative interests in the two disciplines might well account for differences in these findings.

Third, the theoretical analysis suggests that in ritual contexts Aborigines use abstractions of the first degree only, abstractions that have retained a direct link with concrete reality. As we have noted, if that be so, then the contrast between the Aboriginal and western use of abstraction would provide a means to explain cross-cultural communication difficulties. It is this possibility that we want to explore.

We continue therefore to look at the content of cognition as shown in the context of daily living. These data will be examined with a view to discerning differences in the degree of abstraction used. Since Piaget has described the development of abstract reasoning in terms of cognitive levels or stages, in order to avoid confusion we shall continue to refer to degrees or orders of abstraction and not to levels.

One final and tentative comment is in order. Use of higher or of lower order abstraction probably shows some kind of preference in the deployment of the same basic cognitive processes. If, as we expect, Aboriginal cognitive content proves at times to be less abstract than that of whites, then that difference would show no more than alternative preferences, namely that Aborigines prefer to exercise the basic cognitive processes on less abstract content than, sometimes, do whites. Any such preference, we venture to suggest, would have more to do with the culturally accepted world view than with cognitive capacity.

At this point psychologists and anthropologists go their several ways. Nevertheless the findings of this study have some implications both for psychological and anthropological theories. That topic will be addressed in due course (chap. 10), on completion of the analysis.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF ANALYSIS THUS FAR

Following this excursion into developmental psychology, we return to the findings of the previous chapter. We had identified two significant features of the Aboriginal world view and epistemology that contrast with western ideas: an interactional element and the use of one level of abstraction only, that is, abstraction requiring one step only from reality.

Three questions are now important: first, is there any empirical evidence to show that Aborigines do prefer the first degree abstraction and the interactional perspective? Second, is there any evidence to show that such features affect communication between Aborigines and whites? Third, is there any evidence to support other elements of the Aboriginal epistemology? If support is found, results will be two-fold: the logical approach of the previous chapter, and the derived concepts, will be supported, and the theoretical contrast between Aboriginal and western thinking will likewise be supported and endorsed as a means to explain the encounter of Aborigines and whites.

Nevertheless, epistemologies and thought that is based on them are not disembodied; they are used by particular people living in particular situations. Similarly, conceptual encounters occur when people meet. For this reason, before seeking empirical support for the two leads, we consider a brief account of the Aborigines of Aputula, Central Australia and of their contacts with Westerners. Theoretically, the proposed framework is appropriate for elucidating cross-cultural events in that place. For one thing, the analysis of Aboriginal thinking has leaned heavily on rites of increase. These are, or were, practised throughout the area and, at the time of importance to this study, were practised at Aputula. The ontological assumption is, therefore, valid. Conceptualisation of time and space are appropriate also, as is the translation of the *tjukurpa/altjira* concept. If empirical evidence from Aputula supports the single level of abstraction and the interactional element, then the two contrasts in Aboriginal and western thinking will be confirmed as tools to explain the Aboriginal-white encounter that concerns us. But first—the place and the people.

5

The Place and the People

The conceptual encounter between Aborigine and white from which this study arose took place mainly between 1968 and 1975 and most of it at Aputula. When that is not so, the event is identified in the text. The following description, therefore, gives particular attention to the period, but other relevant historical data are included as well. The encounter that interests us occurred in two ways. On the one hand, Aborigines and whites were speaking or working with each other almost every day; thus the account is a record of Aboriginal-white relations, providing detail of events in which both were associated. Some of these occasions are superficially trivial but they are significant because they show the relationship of one with the other and because through these changing contacts a conceptual encounter occurred. On the other hand, Aborigines and whites were not meeting each other physically all day long, for they also lived separate lives each within their own society and culture. At the same time this separate area of their lives is also important for the investigation since even everyday activities within Aboriginal society show some shift from the traditional to the western, a move that brings Aborigines into contact with the western conceptual world although no white is involved directly.

THE PLACE: APUTULA

Aborigines referred to the town as Aputula after a nearby site of significance to them. Situated in undulating desert, the country to the west was covered sparsely with mulga scrub but at Aputula itself, and extending eastward, this was broken increasingly by red, parallel sand ridges that merged into the Simpson Desert. These dunes lay roughly north-south and, in good seasons, were heavily dotted with clumps of coarse grass and crested with light bushy growth. In times of drought, even dry grass disappeared. At the base of one of the dunes, close to the western slope, was the town itself. To the south, both mulga scrub and sand ridges gave way to bare, flat, stony desert, patches of which reached right up to Aputula. Nearby were two rivers. One of these, the Finke, lay three kilometres north of the town and the other, the Goyder, was five kilometres to the south. Both rivers were wide and sandy, lined by river eucalypts and their junction was in the dunes some eight kilometres south-east of the town.

This was a hard country, hot in summer with the temperature often between 40 C and 45 C but on winter nights it dropped below freezing. It was also ancient country, with river sand more than 125 metres deep. The watercourses were usually dry, but the rivers ran after heavy rain; and with widespread and exceptional rains, as in 1974, they flowed throughout their entire length. That year, instead of disappearing in the sand of the Simpson Desert,

the water flowed into Lake Eyre, far away to the south.

Before the white people arrived it was Southern Aranda country, but within the last fifty or sixty years Aborigines of other tribal and linguistic groups became established. These were Luritja (both Matuntjara and Antikirinya), Pitjantjatjara, Yangkuntjatjara and some Arabana. They said that the Southern Aranda almost died out in a severe drought and, subsequently, that their own people moved in—an account of Aboriginal migration that is supported by various maps of the area. In 1965, drawing on earlier work, Strehlow recorded the first three of the above groups in country to the west of Aputula (Strehlow 1965:123), but as a later linguistic map of the Northern Territory shows, it is apparent that at some later time they moved east. During the course of this migration the groups spread out resulting in some territorial overlap (Milliken 1976:239, inside back cover). The Arabana, by contrast, as shown by reference to a map of Elkin's, came north from South Australia (Elkin 1937-1938:421). Tindale's maps based on field work of the 1930s provide added support (Tindale:1974, accompanying maps).

During the 1960s and 1970s (and in large degree still today) the relationship of Aputula Aborigines to land and to totem accorded with traditional belief as described in the literature. It was an association unlike that of ownership but was instead more akin to the link between people related by birth. Alienation was not possible. According to traditional mythology, the land was criss-crossed with tracks and dotted with sites associated with the travels and activities of totemic ancestors. Sites of significance to men of the various groups intermingled and were of great importance for the individual, determining relationship to specific land and totem. They were thus important also in economic and political life. Creatures of totemic significance included the dingo, kangaroo, emu and perentie.

But Westerners did not see the land in these terms. Their tracks and sites were different: they built roads, railways, towns and airfields. They marked out cattle stations, states and territories, and brought their animals with them. They brought also a political and economic structure and a relationship to land and to animals that was different from that of the original inhabitants.

Whites did, however, make living less precarious. As the oldest Aborigines recalled, their parents and grandparents had come to Aputula for the food. Gradually, a mixed group of previously nomadic people settled down to live by choice in country having ritual significance to all of them but on the edge of white settlement.

Looked at from within the western context, the town of Aputula was 230 kilometres south of Alice Springs on the 1200 kilometres railway line that connected 'the Alice' with Port Augusta, South Australia. (In 1980 this line was closed and a new line was opened 140 kilometres to the west.)

Travel on the old single-track, narrow-gauge line was slow, the weekly passenger train often taking six hours to cover the couple of hundred kilometres and the mixed goods and passenger trains taking twelve hours and more. A similar trip by road was twice the distance, for the route was not direct, but took little more than half the time. For the first 140 kilometres running west from Aputula to Kulgera, the road was unsealed, but there it joined the main road linking Alice Springs with the south. By the late 1970s this had been sealed on the northern side as far as the Northern Territory–South Australia border.

Aputula was important to whites for three reasons: it was a centre from which cattle were railed and supplies collected, and it was the site of a repeater station on the overland telegraph line between Darwin and Adelaide. It also boasted a Wayside Inn, commonly referred to as the hotel, the only one on the 470 kilometres stretch of line between Oodnadatta and Alice Springs. As a Wayside Inn it was licensed to open 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year for *bona fide* travellers, making a big difference to the availability of alcohol.

The white people

Whites in the town usually numbered between fifty and sixty, of whom half were children. Commonwealth railway employees were the largest single group. These were the station master, porter, and as a rule five to eight fettlers, the Finke gang. The gang's work of maintaining the railway track was supervised by the local ganger and a regional road master. Married men and their families lived in railway cottages beside the line and single men in the railway mess. Other government employees in the town were the police constable (married) of the Northern Territory force; the postal technician and his wife, the post mistress; and the school teachers, usually one (married) but occasionally two. The hotel was white owned as was the store, but in 1970 the Aboriginal people started a store of their own and in 1971 the other store closed. Finally, by the early 1970s some few whites were working specifically with the Aboriginal community, but no white in the town was retired or unemployed. Either they worked or left.

There was a third group of whites who did not live in the town but whose presence was constantly felt, namely the people from the cattle stations in the area. These cattle properties were (and still are) large, usually 50 000 to 100 000 hectares but some larger again. They were leased by private individuals, but the leases could be renewed and might be held for many years, more than a generation.

Health care in the town was under the supervision of the Northern Territory Medical Service, operating from Alice Springs. A doctor visited by air for regular clinics, usually every three weeks. At other times medical advice was available by telephone and, if need be, an aerial ambulance from Alice Springs picked up emergency patients from the town's air strip. Less serious cases were treated locally or taken to hospital by rail or road. Those patients listed to do so attended specialist clinics in Alice Springs, but some were flown to Darwin at Health Department expense for specialist attention. Prior to 1975 it sometimes happened that a trained nurse might live at Aputula, her husband having work in the town. If this was so, she undertook local responsibility, but when there was no nurse, medical work had to be undertaken by the police constable or private individuals. In 1976 the Australian Inland Mission (now Frontier Services of the Uniting Church in Australia) established a clinic staffed by two nursing sisters.

Relationship between Aborigines and whites at Aputula was usually good. Everyone joined in community activities, for instance, film shows, barbecues, the Easter race meeting and the Christmas tree party. Aboriginal and white children attended the same school, and when the youngsters went on school excursions, the town raised money for

them all. On the other hand, tension could be acute between Aborigines and whites. Usually it came to the surface when there was a conflict of interest, maybe between white employer and Aboriginal employee, or when people were drunk—either Aboriginal or white. This did not apply to all Aborigines nor to all whites. For one thing, not every Aborigine nor every drunken white was aggressive.

The Aboriginal people

During most of the 1960s and 1970s the number of Aborigines living at Aputula varied between 80 and 100. They had retained their own language and among themselves, both adults and children, spoke Luritja, Yangkuntjatjara or Pitjantjatjara, all closely related dialects of the same language. In addition, the adults were fluent speakers of so-called 'station English'. In this form of English, the syntax used was simple, the vocabulary practical, and often sentence structure was derived from the Aboriginal languages. At the same time Aborigines understood more complex English than they spoke. Young people who had attended school and school children spoke English more fluently than did their elders.

Until 1973 most Aborigines lived on the sandhill about 100 metres east of the town, but a few lived on the western side, beyond the railway line. All lived on crown land in wurlies (or humpies) built from bush timber and scrap materials such as corrugated iron, hessian, canvas and dressed timber discarded by whites. Building was usually done by men, but women sometimes assisted. Wurlies in the main camp, that is on the sandhill, tended to be close together, but by the middle of the 1960s they were built further apart and eventually the camp extended over 200 metres. This occurred after the adoption of the *Northern Territory Social Welfare Ordinance 1964*. This with other legislation of the time was designed to remove restrictions placed on Aborigines on account of race. From that time they had full citizenship rights and some privileges: for instance, they did not have to vote, as white Australians are required to do, and they were permitted to kill game for food that was otherwise protected by law. Results of this legislation were felt immediately at Aputula, particularly in two respects: Aborigines and whites now had the same access to hotel premises and to alcohol, and cohabitation between Aborigines and whites was now no offence. The result in camp was that over a period of time non-drinking nuclear families moved away from the drinking units.[1]

One family that had no need to move was that of the police tracker and his wife. They already lived apart from the rest of the camp in a shed in the police yard, but subsequently, some time early in the 1970s, this couple was provided with a house by the police department. Another Aborigine who lived apart from the rest of the camp was a woman married (de facto) to a white. Their house, built by the husband, was across the railway line west of the town and away from the main body of people.

Both wood and water were difficult to obtain in camp. Possibly because the town had been established for some time, wood was scarce nearby. Sometimes whites helped in its collection, maybe in person but perhaps by lending a small truck. Sometimes, also, the Aboriginal tracker carried wood in the police vehicle. Cooking was done on open fires

outside the humpies: tins of meat were heated, stews made in saucepans, water boiled for tea, damper cooked in the coals, or dough fried in fat. Water was obtained from the railway tank 200 metres from the main camp, or from a tap at the school 100 metres away. While drinking and cooking supplies had to be carried to camp (usually in buckets or 20-litre drums), clothes for washing were often taken nearer the water source and washed in basins.

Many householders kept the area in the immediate vicinity of their wurlie tidy as well as caring for the inside, but possessions were minimal. Not all families had tables. Most families had a camp bed or two and some had mattresses only, but other people slept on the ground. Food was stored in drums, boxes or buckets, or placed on the roof to keep it out of the reach of dogs. Most Aborigines had never lived in houses, although two families had done so, and some women had worked in them. Then, in 1971 the Aputula housing programme commenced, financed by government, which enabled the Aputula Aborigines to design and build their own homes.

All families kept dogs, usually several. Some of these were small pet dogs of indeterminate ancestry; others were large hunting dogs. The appearance of some suggested greyhound blood and some showed also their dingo origins. Writing about Yalata, White indicates that only hunting dogs were well trained and cared for (White 1972:201-5) but this was not so at Aputula. Instead, the health and obedience of dogs varied directly with owner rather than with the economic value of the dog. Dogs were loved at Aputula, but valued also for three main reasons: their hunting ability, the warmth they provided in winter, and their ability to sense and chase away evil spirits. On one occasion, when a small pet dog was accidentally killed, the owners moved camp by a few metres, following in principle the custom followed on the death of a person.

Aborigines at Aputula recognised one major division between themselves: the Southern Aranda were from the *katu* 'high' side and the rest, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara, Yangkuntjatjara and Arabana, were from the *munga* 'night' side. Reference was to the country and to the kinship system adopted by the Aborigines who traditionally lived within it. Southern Aranda, *katu* people, used the section system, but the *munga* people accented instead the generation level.[2] All *munga* Aborigines at Aputula referred to themselves as Pitjantjatjara, a practice adopted 'for the white people', and one followed in this text except when greater specificity is required.

Almost the entire Aboriginal population was of full descent, but one Aputula woman was married to a Thursday Islander and another, as noted, to a white. Marriages between Aborigines in all but one case were in accord with Elkin's Aluritja system (Aluridja in Elkin's rendering; see Elkin 1937-1938:423-4; 1939-1940:201 ff.). Cross cousins were classified as brothers and sisters and a man obtained his wife either through mother's brother or father's sister. In all but one of these correct marriages, the wife-giver was the actual or close classificatory father or mother of the wife and the distant classificatory mother's brother or father's sister of the husband. In the other marriage, the mother's brother was the close relative of the man but a distant relation of the woman. Pitjantjatjara professed ignorance of the section and subsection systems, but one man, who had come south from Western Aranda country (he was born at Glen Helen), gave the names and marriage preferences of the 8-subsection system. But neither these nor those of the Southern Aranda 4-section system were observed. While marriages occurred between

Southern Aranda and Pitjantjatjara, the *munga* people outnumbered the *katu* and perhaps for this reason *munga* marriage preferences were effectively in use.

Since classificatory kinship was determinant in almost all marriages, the traditional kin-based social structure was almost intact and was the basis of social behaviour generally, both sacred and profane.[3] There was one marriage that did not conform with traditional custom. It was unacceptable to Aborigines because husband and wife were of proximate generations and, causing further difficulties, the father-in-law was the Pitjantjatjara ritual leader and the son-in-law the Southern Aranda leader. Strict observance of the traditional avoidance relationship was (presumably) difficult, and in practice the son-in-law and his family lived in the father-in-law's camp. Enquiry revealed that, as young people, the couple had worked on a neighbouring cattle station, he as stockman and she as housegirl. They were encouraged to marry by their employers and, for whatever reason, the alliance was not broken up by the Aboriginal people. This probably showed that they valued association with these whites who were influential in the area.

In sacred affairs, the senior ritual leader was a man of over seventy years, a Yangkuntjatjara, born some 400 kilometres to the south-west of Aputula in the vicinity of Fregon, and trained from his youth in traditional law. He came to Aputula with his family as a child and then stayed on. The Southern Aranda leader was at least thirty years younger. He was born in the town itself 'just up the sandhill', but due to the breakdown in ritual observance and especially of Southern Aranda, he did not have the traditional knowledge of his Yangkuntjatjara partner. The patrilines of these two men were ritually senior to all others at Aputula and together the two leaders had the responsibility of looking after the country. This caring was exercised in two ways. One appeared to require no more than being there and taking action in cases of offence, as might occur if someone committed sacrilege. The other had to do with the upkeep of ritual observance—the responsibility of the ceremonial leader.

Ceremony was still important at Aputula, but rites were not practised as often as in earlier years. One factor that could have adversely affected ritual observance was the 'wrong' marriage referred to above. As a result of that marriage, the two religious leaders became father-in-law and son-in-law, requiring the observance of the traditional avoidance relationship. Other factors also must have had an adverse influence such as the loss of Southern Aranda lives in the drought and, not least, the general disruption of Aboriginal life caused by white settlement. Nevertheless, although ritual activity was reduced, it had by no means ceased, and it remained important to the Aboriginal people. Men, but more often women, kept up the performance of ceremonies to some extent. One that was retained was the second burial rite, but in 1975, on their own initiative, Aborigines chose a site for a cemetery and since then Christian burials have been conducted (either by a local Aborigine or by a visiting white minister from Alice Springs). This change in ritual practice was made two years after the Aboriginal people moved into houses. Until that time it was customary for most of the camp to move following a death, if only twenty-five metres or so. After the change to houses the bereaved family alone moved. Close relatives of the deceased usually went away for a time and on return, moved into another house or built a wurlie near to a relative's house so that they could share the facilities—laundry, toilet and shower. The rest of the people did not move. In short, for whatever reasons there was a

general reduction in ritual observance at Aputula and a number of ritual practices had been modified.

Kinship was important and traditional rights and obligations were observed in the distribution of goods: food, wages and other items such as radios, guitars and clothing. Food and other gifts were given to parents and grandparents; to father's sister and mother's brother; and to spouse, older brother and brother-in-law. A young man gave gifts to his father-in-law and mother-in-law. Children received food from parents, mother's brother and grandmothers. Outside this pattern gifts were not usually given, but there might be an exception.

While distribution of goods had suffered little change, their initial collection had been altered substantially. These changes brought Aborigines into closer contact with whites. For one thing, rifles had replaced the traditional hunting weapons at Aputula but, in addition, hunting and foraging were both greatly reduced. During the whole of the 1960s this reduction could be attributed in large degree to drought and to the increasing effect of myxomatosis on the rabbit population. But even after the drought broke and following good seasons at the end of the 1960s the bigger game, kangaroo (*malu*) and emu (*kaliya*), remained scarce in the area. So too did the rabbits. Lizards were a source of meat in the warmer weather, the main varieties being perentie (*ngintarka*), goanna (*milpali*) and a semi-frilled lizard (*ankata*) that changes colour from grey to ochre red, depending on the colour of the background. Much more rarely, witchetty grubs (*maku*) were collected, usually from the branches of river eucalypts. After rain, when the Finke River ran, it carried fish with it from permanent waters nearer the source; they were caught in pools as the water dried up. Occasionally galahs (*kiyarkiyarpa*) and black cockatoos (*iranti*) were eaten and, when available which was rare, wild turkey (*kipara*), echidna (*tjirilya*) and feral cat.

Dingoes (*tjitutja*), foxes (*tu:ka*), camels and wild horses were found in the area but were not eaten, although in earlier days, and only in extreme circumstances, dog and camel were said to have been consumed—by other people. Foxes, camels, horses and cats had been introduced into Australia by Westerners, as had the rabbits.

Occasionally, on a casual basis, vegetable food was collected: solanum (*kumpultjali* and *tawaltawalpa*), an edible bulb (*tjanmata*) and, from rocky hills west of Aputula, wild figs (*i:li*).

Possibly because little was available within walking distance of the town, none of the traditional foods was a mainstay of the population and people relied in the main on bought food. However, children looked for the bush vegetable foods, and fresh meat was greatly enjoyed—as was the occupation of hunting. When an opportunity arose for hunting or foraging, people took advantage of it. This was so particularly before the full effects of drought and myxomatosis were felt. Groups of kin used to camp away from the town for months on end, living partly off the land, shooting and digging for rabbits. One limiting factor was the availability of water, and often a camp was supplied with water using 200-litre drums. After the drought broke, water was available but hunting did not fully recover. As a rule, it was necessary to go 100 kilometres west before coming to country where kangaroo and emu were fairly regularly sighted. For this reason, dependence on the town gradually increased.

ABORIGINAL-WHITE ENCOUNTERS

Economic activities

We have noted that economic encounters are often the area of Aboriginal-white contact in which misunderstandings occur and conceptual differences are revealed. We are interested, therefore, in tracing in greater detail the development of economic associations between Aborigines and whites at Aputula. This development can be summarised as an increasing economic reliance by the Aborigines on white society.

From early days there were two main aspects to the economic encounter at Aputula: one placed Aborigines in a situation of dependence through a system of hand-outs; the other brought Aborigines into the work force. In the first case, a major source of food was the ration depot. This depot was at the police station and, in the days when few received social security cheques, weekly rations were distributed by the policeman. Then from 1969 onwards social security payments were increased. Keeping step with the change, the ration depot dwindled until, by the early 1970s, it provided food for the indigent only. This alteration resulted in an additional and significant contact between Aborigines and whites with consequences that flowed into Aboriginal society itself. Instead of receiving a more or less standard issue of food, suddenly, many Aborigines became largely or totally dependent on social security money. Simultaneously, they became a significant source of income for local commercial operators at the store and at the hotel.

The other way to get money was to earn it. Through work Aborigines and whites engaged in joint activity and depended on each other.

During the 1960s and until the Aboriginal housing programme began in the early 1970s, only a few Aboriginal men had jobs in the town of Aputula. These were the police tracker, the school gardener (until 1971 a part-time job) and the store employee. As well as his police duties, the tracker looked after the police department grounds and undertook minor work on the police Toyota. The store worker had little to do, mainly tidying, disposing of rubbish and watering the garden, but he was expected by his employer to be on hand for the greater part of the day, seven days a week. He also met the perishables train with his employer, usually twice a week. One went through on Saturday afternoons and the others, as a rule, any time from 11.00 p.m. to 4.00 a.m. on Tuesday and Friday nights. The Thursday Islander worked as a fettler with the railways. One Aborigine had held such a job for a short time, but he was dismissed for absenteeism following the receipt of pay. From that time, with one exception, no Aborigine had been offered a fettler's job in Aputula although the work was available to them at railway camps where there was no hotel and where, therefore, it was more difficult to get liquor. Lastly, from the town itself, men tailed (shepherded) cattle that were brought in for trucking. This work was intermittent and on a casual basis.

Three women were employed in part-time domestic work—at the store, the hotel and the school. Two more had jobs with the welfare department, one cooked a mid-day meal for the Aboriginal school children and the other laundered their clothes.

Out of town, cattle stations or contractors linked with the cattle industry provided other jobs for Aborigines, usually stock work, fencing, yard work (such as chopping wood

and gardening) and, occasionally, sinking bores for water. Often women relatives of male employees worked on the cattle stations, usually as domestics, but sometimes they undertook yard work and sometimes also worked as stockriders with the men; in earlier days they herded goats.

Payment for work varied with the employer. Government departments paid award wages, but the store paid poorly, only $6.00 per week. Furthermore the store employee was on call for long hours and so was unable to get away for hunting.

On the cattle stations, wages and residential patterns changed over a number of years. The previous generation of stockmen lived and worked on the one property. Their extended family lived there too and often the station owner supplied them all with meat. Then the *Northern Territory Wards Employment Regulations 1959* came into force. This set down the living accommodation that had to be provided for Aboriginal workers, and it was followed by an alteration in the *Commonwealth Pastoral Industry Award* that came into effect in 1968. From that time Aborigines received the same wages under the award as whites.

The practical consequences were important for Aboriginal social life. After the changes it became uneconomic for a station owner to employ an Aborigine if his whole family accompanied him. Most of the families moved, therefore, to Aputula and workers had to go out from there to employment. Young lads from the age of fourteen years and even younger went off, at first with older male relatives but later with one or more of their peer group. The result was that families and community were effectively split up and the social contact between members greatly reduced. Being illiterate they could not communicate by mail.

Another result of the legislation was that instead of remaining on a property and working for the same boss over years, as soon as the muster or fencing was finished, men were out of work. They themselves wanted to be with their relations and at the same time the boss did not want them at the station. So they were brought in to Aputula, often in light aircraft, or taken to the railway, to make their own way back. In this way, links with a particular station or boss were weakened and the next job was often with someone else. For the employers, Aputula became a convenient pool for workers, but from the Aboriginal viewpoint, whites showed themselves prepared to end an association when it suited them. Increasingly Aborigines, especially the younger generation, did so too.

An additional point was that whites began to take over some of the work previously done by Aborigines. With unemployment rising in the Australian community as a whole, with more young whites prepared to take a job in the bush, with more fences than previously within which even a newcomer should not get lost, the inexperienced white was able to perform a useful job and, therefore, to compete in the labour market with skilled Aborigines. In addition, many of these whites were too young to be covered by the award and could be paid less than an older experienced man. While employers praised the older Aboriginal men, they no longer employed as many of them, and they regarded the younger Aboriginal stockmen as unreliable. In short, the earlier working conditions offered Aborigines greater opportunity for community living and work stability, but subsequently, after the families had to move in to Aputula, there was considerable social disruption and greater instability in the work place.

In another change that followed the increase in wages, those Aborigines who were still employed purchased radios, tape recorders, guitars and expensive stockman's clothing through their employers. As a result, when the time came to pay men off, the Aborigine often felt himself underpaid. This was a recurrent problem, although the boss could prove his position with receipts from suppliers and the Aborigine acknowledged receiving the goods. Because length of employment was less than it used to be and because purchases had been made against wages, the net effect was that when men were paid off the cheque received was smaller than before award wages were paid, and ill feeling resulted.

One continuing problem with all payments, both wages and social security cheques, was the white people's habit of paying in lump sums creating a temporary surplus. In the town they paid at the end of a week or once a fortnight, but on the cattle stations at the end of several months mustering. This practice made difficulties for Aborigines who traditionally gathered supplies each day. Then, whatever was in hand they shared according to custom, that is with appropriate kin, and it was used straightaway. The white people's cultural things, such as radios and money, received the same treatment.

At Aputula, as a result of work opportunities, men were accustomed to handling more money than women. Often all those on cattle stations were paid off together, within a week or two of Christmas, and at that time might have a couple of thousand dollars between them. As a result, after a financial drought in the town during which women and children struggled to get enough to eat, suddenly husbands, fathers and brothers were back with cheques in hand. Women and children received some of this money and some clothing was bought and enough food for a day or two, but by far the greater part was spent by the men on liquor. Often female kin helped them to drink it. Men said that their wages belonged to them and that women had their child endowment payments. Although, therefore, a large temporary surplus of cash was sometimes in camp, in the main men shared it with male kin. Cars were not purchased by stockmen at that time although often there was plenty of money available. A common pattern was that they cashed their cheques at the hotel, paid any debt, bought a few flagons of wine, shared some money with women and children as explained, and largely continued drinking until the money was gone. Before they went out on the next job, they might owe money again at the hotel and so the process was repeated. Sometimes, usually briefly, money was banked with the Commonwealth Bank agency at the post office.

Until 1970-1971 the cattle station wages provided the major (if temporary) surpluses that came into the camp, but those living in Aputula on social security payments, or working there, handled smaller surpluses with their own money—that is, each week or fortnight or month as the payments were received. These surpluses were treated in principle in the same way as the larger sums. In practice, therefore, money was shared according to traditional custom. Certain relatives had a right to receive and those with money had an obligation to give, but traditional rights and duties were honoured without much, if any, attention to quantitative considerations.

As well as receiving wages, Aborigines were to a limited extent self-employed. For instance, over the years wooden artifacts, such as boomerangs, were made to sell both locally and to the tourists coming past on the train. Over the years also australites (tektites) were collected and sold. These small, dark lumps of vitreous material are believed to be

of meteoric origin. Australites were always saleable either locally or to traders in Alice Springs, although the price varied considerably depending on the value of individual stones and the current market rate. Aborigines searched also for rocks suitable for polishing but without much success. Lastly, during 1969, another form of self employment was the hunting and selling of wild camels. This provided intermittent work for four men for nine months.

In brief, until the end of 1969, opportunities for work were limited both in variety and length of employment. Some attempts were made in self-help schemes, but they were hindered by lack of physical resources and training. Economically the Aboriginal community was depressed, but increasingly it was being introduced to the white society's system of economics and, thus, to the associated concepts.

Schooling

Another activity that brought Aborigines into close contact with whites was schooling. In this also the community was disadvantaged. Few of the Aboriginal adults at Aputula had attended school, but the church leader had learned to read and write Pitjantjatjara at Ernabella mission (now the Pukatja community) and the police tracker and Thursday Islander were both literate in English. Some of the other adults could sign their names but in print, not cursive writing.

School attendance was good, but the standard of education achieved was low. Only one Aboriginal child had passed the primary examination and most left school barely able to read and write and lacking numeracy. A few reached a sufficient standard to write letters and to read newspapers.

Teachers faced many difficulties. The Education Department provided accommodation for a married teacher. Whether or not there were two teachers depended on the accident of a second teacher living somewhere else in the town. For instance, during 1968-1969 the police constable's wife was a trained teacher. Even with two, the task was difficult enough. Including white children, numbers ranged from 12 to over 30 and the ages from six to fourteen. While there was a steady core of pupils, numbers in any one term could fluctuate widely due to the presence of Aboriginal visitors or to family absences from town. Often there were more Aboriginal children than whites and, for them, English was a second language, not that of the home. Classes were from the first to final year of primary school, but occasionally white children undertook the first year of high school, working from correspondence lessons and supervised by the teacher.

Teacher turnover was high. While some teachers stayed for more than a year, others were transferred sooner. Over the years many made immense efforts to teach the children, but as a result of the unsatisfactory features noted above, they were often forced to spend much time in practical subjects like craft work, gardening, sport, or, with the aid of suitably qualified women in the town, dressmaking. Films were also a regular feature of school and often teachers showed them for the town as a whole. Not surprisingly, some young people became disillusioned with schooling, for it did not open any doors. But older Aborigines said they would like to learn to read and write, and some teachers arranged weekly classes

for them. Adults appeared also to value learning for their children, for they encouraged them to go to school every day and many of them attended parents meetings.

Drinking and prostitution

Aborigines and whites came into close association also through drinking and the associated prostitution.

After the prohibition on Aboriginal drinking was removed, many Aborigines drank heavily and often in company with whites. This resulted in fighting (usually between Aborigines), noise, financial deprivation, and for a time the presence of promiscuous whites in camp.

Fighting did not always accompany drinking, but commonly did. Its seriousness depended on the supply of money, the type of liquor purchased and the particular people drinking. Spirits, often rum, caused wild fights; wine did so to a slightly lesser extent; and beer least of all. But any of them, particularly if mixed, could be linked with serious fights.

Fighting affected not only drinkers but often non-drinkers as well. Although it was illegal, weapons were often used. These could be anything at hand: a spade, rake or garden fork (used like a bayonet), an axe or knife, a length of wood, broken bottles or flagons, stones—anything. Stones or half bricks were dangerous because most Aborigines threw with great force and accuracy, even when drunk. The choice of weapons, however, was not completely a matter of chance, for the seriousness of a fight could sometimes be gauged by the weapon. A broom handle and a hatchet carry different messages.

Noise was another major problem. Some people, when drunk, shouted almost continuously. Argumentative shouts could be kept up at a high level for hours with comments, maybe only one or two words, repeated over and over and over again. Shouters were usually not fighters—they yelled instead—but few could sleep against the nuisance and there was always the possibility that they would trigger a fight.

Economic pressures also resulted from the consumption of alcohol. Drinking was, as a rule, by family. Some nuclear families drank, others did not, normally in accord with the habit of the senior male. The pattern was associated, therefore, with the operation of the kinship system, a major determinant for the economic impact of liquor. As we have seen, material goods were used traditionally to express relationship. Money and goods of western origin were treated in the same way, including alcohol as noted in an earlier paper (Bain 1974:48-9). Albrecht made the same point and spelt out clearly that in giving and receiving, relationship is honoured. Conversely, refusal either to give or to receive amounts to repudiation of relationship. Immense pressure was thus placed on the individual by close kin to conform with their own drinking habit (Albrecht 1974:38). The drunken person did not accept 'No' as an answer and would fight the relative who refused to join him in drinking (Bain 1974:47). As a result, moderation of a habit was to all intents and purposes impossible, although it could be achieved for socially acceptable reasons such as to care for a baby (Bain 1974:48). Another way was to 'sit apart', but this was lonely as those who tried it have reported. Never to have a drink, or as Aborigines refer to it 'to be ignorant of drinking', was acceptable also. Whether or not to drink at all was thus to

some extent for an individual to decide, but once having drunk alcohol, the decision on quantity remained with society (Bain 1974:47).

But it was not only drinkers who were under pressure. Non-drinkers did not escape and were expected by drinkers to conform in other ways, for instance, by providing food for a hungry, drunken person and by feeding his children. These points are similar to those made by Albrecht (Albrecht 1974:37). Relations, usually women, sometimes came to me at night asking for food in order to avoid a brawl with their inebriated male kin. Drunken people also asked non-drinkers for money. Pressure on those believed to have money could be incessant and infuriating, so that non-drinkers who wished to keep it sometimes either banked it or hid it away. They could then turn out their pockets and show that they had none. It was not necessarily big money that was sought and a fight could start over a man's last 20 cents. When all was collected, resources might be sufficient for that last flagon.

Today, things are different and few drinking problems remain. The situation began to change after action by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs who in 1975, at the people's request, purchased the Finke hotel for the Aputula community. From that time, by community decision, beer only was sold to take away. Now fifteen years later, with Aborigines holding the liquor licence in their own hands, supplies are often allowed to run out for weeks on end.

Just as requests by people for material goods followed traditional patterns, so sexual rights at Aputula conformed with traditional custom. If any breach was suspected, trouble resulted. Drunken whites, however, often made demands for sexual access to Aboriginal women. When legislation removed the prohibition on Aboriginal drinking, cohabitation became legal also, and this had an effect on prostitution. After this legislation there was much greater social intercourse, with concomitant sexual intercourse, between Aborigines and whites—especially when there was cash in hand and people were drunk. Nevertheless, some Aborigines, most of them non-drinkers, were strongly opposed to having anything to do with drinking whites because, as they knew, it so often led to prostitution. There was, however, an economic factor. One reason why women became involved was because they needed the money. Especially in the drought years, before regular employment was available and before social security benefits were adequate, some women had no alternative. This agrees with Rowley's findings (Rowley 1972:262, 334).

In the 1960s heavy drinking and the associated prostitution often involved Commonwealth railway employees. These men, all white save one, were paid once a fortnight. Following pay day, a number of them, drunk already, used to go up to the camp area. They offered liquor and money and wanted company, irrespective of whether or not they were welcome. Chaos resulted.

The following two incidents show Aboriginal resentment of the white presence in camp. The first was an occasion when several members of the Hermannsburg Aboriginal Council were visiting the Aputula councillors and community.

On the first evening of their stay one householder was unable to expel a drunken white from his camp. Neither the wine he brought nor his promiscuous advances were welcome, and despite requests to him to go away, he remained at the fireside. The man whose camp it was approached the local Aboriginal councillors for help. With them was a visiting minister from Alice Springs, a white man (J. H. Downing) who gave the following account

of what happened. Arriving at the camp the Aboriginal men hesitated briefly, and then suddenly one of the Aputula men advanced swiftly and told the unwelcome white to leave. He refused but found himself surrounded by a group of men, all shining torches in his face. In no uncertain terms he was told to go: as one tall dignified Aborigine said, 'Run—afore I kick you in the arse'. Getting the message at last, the visitor started to move, but was not quick enough. Speeded on his way as promised, he fled back to the hotel where, as the hotel keeper reported later, he arrived gasping and white-faced and hastily drowned his sorrows. It was the first time, to my knowledge, that the Aboriginal people had rid the camp of a white person.

About six weeks later, during my absence, they repeated their success. As Aboriginal men recounted later, the railway employees received their fortnightly pay. Following this and not long after dark, 'a big mob' of them, probably about fifteen, headed for the camp. Suddenly an old Aborigine, a councillor, took action. Grasping a boomerang, he ran out and hurled it at the advancing men and then the whole camp joined in to support him—Aboriginal men, women and children, including some of those for whose camp the men were believed to be headed. All kinds of weapons were used: sticks, stones and buckets, anything at hand. After this, few whites came up to camp and when they did, police help to remove them was more readily available than it had been before. After a month or so, and possibly connected with the event, the Commonwealth railway authorities started to employ more married men at Aputula. In a further change, those Aborigines who wished to drink with the railway employees went over the railway line, on the far side from the main Aboriginal camp, where the single men's mess was situated.

In short, while prostitution occurred at Aputula, there was considerable resistance to the practice—resentment and rejection of it by certain sections of the community, notably the non-drinkers—but also there was financial need and a degree of ambivalence among some of those involved.

As these examples show, in a variety of ways Aborigines came into contact with western economic and financial procedures and although it might not be immediately obvious, with underlying western concepts. Then in 1968 through the formation of the Aputula Aboriginal Council, a new and significant avenue of encounter began to open up. It came about in this way.

The Aboriginal council

After white settlement, and particularly close to towns, traditional Aboriginal authority was weakened. Aputula people attributed this weakening to the prohibition by whites of traditional sanctions, an imposition that itself created difficulties. One night in 1968, Aboriginal stockmen of part descent and all from Alice Springs, having money and being drunk, went up to the camp and demanded access to teenage schoolgirls. This was not a new event. What action would have been taken before my arrival I do not know, but on that occasion the girls were brought to me and with a close kinsman and his wife they slept at my place (at that time no more than a camp fire in the open). Men said next day that in earlier years they would have speared the young men in the thigh and sent them away, but now

the white law forbade it.[4] While the problem that those young men posed was avoided on that occasion, the difficulty remained. Hearing that Hermannsburg Aborigines had formed a council and hoping that this might prove effective, Aputula men visited Hermannsburg and, on return, formed the Aputula council. Councillors decided to wear a red hat band on a broad-brimmed hat as a sign of office. The kangaroo and emu, as the two most important totemic species in the area, were chosen to be displayed on the badge with a 'C' (for council, as a feature significant for whites) and the name Aputula.

The council had two main functions: it was an agency in social control and it provided a link between the community and government departments and agencies. In respect of the first of these functions, the council was effective not so much as a council *per se* but because the members between them, according to traditional roles, held authority across the community. Before formation of the council men seemed reluctant to exercise this authority but afterwards did so and to a considerable extent. Sometimes even when people were drunk, this authority was respected. One probable reason for this new-found effectiveness was that almost from its inception, the council was able to establish some contact with senior members of the Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration, Alice Springs, and later with the then Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra. The council was seen, therefore, both by the community and councillors themselves, as a body of some significance in western eyes—if not initially in the eyes of local whites. Moreover, within a matter of two or three months it was councillors who were successful in ejecting the whites from camp. Nevertheless, within the community, the council's authority was traditionally based. As a result of this, social control and politics were closely interwoven.

In practice membership of the council fluctuated. If a group of people arrived and stayed for a time, perhaps following the death of an Aboriginal person elsewhere, one of their number was invited onto the council, thus preserving the breadth of traditional authority in the community. At other times, if a man had been consistently drunk, other councillors did not tell him when they were meeting. In this way they by-passed the person and he was said to be on holiday.

Council approaches to government started soon after its formation in 1968. The initial approach was the result of two important Aboriginal-white encounters that occurred about the same time. One of these was a discussion with the police constable, the first meeting of its kind. The men raised a perennial question: the presence of drunken whites in camp. The policeman said that if the Aboriginal people could get land and fence it, his job would be easier. He held that the camp was on Crown Land and anyone had a right to be there, but if land were owned (or leased) and fenced, removal of unwanted persons would be easier—if only because they would be more easily identified as unwanted. Individual people in camp could then exercise more control over their own camp area with his help. The community responded positively to his information. The second encounter to influence councillors was a visit by a member of the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration (NTA). Once a year a representative took a census of Aboriginal people and this visit happened to coincide with the discussion noted above. After the census Aborigines complained that 'Welfare' never did anything but count them like bullocks, but being encouraged by their meeting with the police constable, councillors decided to do something about it. Although none of them was literate and although they had never

received a letter from a government department, they decided to write to the NTA, hoping to enlist government support. This, their first letter (4 August 1968), was dictated to me in Pitjantjatjara and I sent it off with an English translation appended. The council asked for water and fences: water for washing, for toilets and for gardens; fences to keep out drunks. Houses were not mentioned at that time.

Replies were encouraging as far as they went, that is, verbally, then 'Welfare' decided to build a public toilet at Aputula. It was to be in the Aboriginal camp and was to be for Aborigines and whites alike. Preliminary surveying was done by a team sent from Alice Springs. The plan produced a straight letter from the council. They pointed out that it would bring drunken whites into camp, that these whites would make the camp bad, and that they would wait at the public toilets for women and girls and would harm them. The council insisted that they had asked for facilities for Aborigines, not for whites, and they refused to be included in any proposal that catered for whites in camp. No reply was received but the project did not go ahead.

After this there was a prolonged wait. No one refused assistance, but none was extended and replies to letters took months. During this time one suggestion from Welfare was that the Aputula people all move to Ernabella. Finally, after eighteen months of letters and waiting and nothing, Welfare advised the people to take up leases for blocks of land within the town area. The people were by now asking for houses, and since the blocks each carried a covenant of $3000 (for improvements), it was the beginning of a promise of help. Initially six families applied and, by the end of December 1969, word came through that leases were granted.

It was in this type of work and in the self-employment projects that went forward at the same time that the council was most effective and seen to be so. In the longer term the council was important because, as it continued this work with western administrators, it was treated by them as a western-style elected council. They accorded it a western type of authority, not one based on kinship and ritual seniority in land, although that was the ground from which the council had developed and on which it still stood. Through the council, therefore, a major conceptual encounter occurred as increasingly, Aborigines were expected to assume western administrative roles.

In all these ways, individual Aborigines had contact with whites or with western ideas. This contact occurred through changes in Aboriginal lifestyle, through economic affairs, work and schooling, through self-help schemes and, last but not least, through the council. These day-to-day events provided the physical setting for a conceptual meeting of Aborigines and whites. It was in contexts such as these that misunderstandings sometimes arose and in which communication was sometimes difficult. To that topic we now return.

NOTES

1. Throughout this text those who drink alcohol are referred to as 'drinkers', those who do not as 'non-drinkers'.
2. This Aboriginal terminology agrees with a notation from Strehlow. Recording an incident in Aranda mythology he writes that in the course of their travels, the *tjilpa* 'native cat' ancestors crossed

north into what is now Aranda territory. After this they referred to each other by class names. They looked back at Luritja, over whose country they had passed, remarking that they were 'covered by night' having 'no form of address' (Strehlow 1965:133).

3. The importance of classificatory kinship for Aboriginal social behaviour has been well documented and there is no need here to address the topic directly. Those interested might read the relevant sections in any general account of traditional Aboriginal life, for instance Elkin 1979; Berndt & Berndt 1977; or they might wish to pursue the topic in works such as that of Meggitt 1962 or Berndt & Berndt 1970.

4. One may ask why Aborigines hesitated to use spears when white law failed to punish the violence associated with drinking. All that can be said is that in Aboriginal experience, whites did not allow the use of spears but effectively, drunken fighting often went unpunished. One reason for this was that Aborigines themselves used white law only marginally for self protection. Drunken violence occurred within the community or involved visiting relatives, and Aborigines at Aputula did not lay charges against one another. On one occasion, on coming out of hospital, a visitor did lay charges, but he returned only briefly to the town.

6

Empirical Support for the Proposed Explanatory Tools: Language

In Chapter 1 we assumed that culture is a set of coordinated ideas and that it is inherent in the world view, in the system of concepts that underlie it, and more basic still in the epistemology that undergirds both. In addition, we have argued that Aboriginal understanding of sacred affairs, specifically of causality, is characterised by concepts and categories of thought that are no more than one step removed from reality. We might expect, therefore, that these features of Aboriginal thinking and knowing will also characterise the world view and that as elements of culture these will be passed on by one generation to the next. In that case, since language is a vehicle of thought through which much of the transmission occurs, we can predict that the conceptual content accorded to lexical and grammatical features will also bear the same sociocultural lineaments: that it will give evidence of a single degree of abstraction. At the same time it will support the notion of interaction, and will provide some evidence of the Aborigine's conceived natural environment and of himself within it. To put this another way, because cognition is coordinated (cognitive structure, content of cognition, logic and degree of abstraction), we can expect that language will suggest the order of abstraction favoured by those who use it. Examination of an Aboriginal language, therefore, should provide evidence of the features we have noted, the order of abstraction and interactional process, and thus support their use as tools to explain the meeting of Aboriginal and white.

The points made here are important, but as we start empirical investigations, it is necessary also to remember what cross-cultural differences would actually signify. If the linguistic data shows that Aborigines use first degree abstraction and concrete logic only, although Westerners often use second degree abstraction and formal logic, then the material will simply show alternative preferences. In other words, cognitive performance reflects preference and, in the present instance, this performance will be shown in language. Nevertheless a demonstration of cognitive performance must not be confused with a demonstration of cognitive capacity. The two are essentially different and any failure to distinguish between them is fundamentally incorrect. If the data remains tied to reality, that cannot be taken as a reflection of cognitive ability. Instead it would show the value Aborigines place on retaining the link with the real. This linkage, as our analysis has shown, characterises their conceptual system and world view. In short, preference, performance and world view are in keeping with each other, but cognitive capacity is something else again and is not at issue.

All Aborigines at Aputula spoke Pitjantjatjara or the closely related dialects Luritja and Yangkuntjatjara, as we have seen. The language examined here is Pitjantjatjara. This

will be compared with English since the encounter that concerns us in this study is that between Pitjantjatjara and English speakers. We do not undertake an elaborate statement of the English vocabulary, presupposing that the reader has a knowledge of this language. Neither Pitjantjatjara nor English is set up as the standard, but differences or alternative interests will be noted.

There are two empirical aspects of language to assess: (a) lexical and grammatical features, and (b) language in use. In this chapter we examine, firstly, vocabulary that is significant primarily for degree of abstraction and, afterwards, data that are important for the notion of interaction, but there is no hard and fast distinction between these two. Lastly, we examine epistemological concepts and vocabulary. These have some direct relevance to the order of abstraction and are indirectly significant for notions of interaction. We will examine language in use in chapter 7.

In the Aboriginal examples given, the reader's attention is drawn to a general trend towards the concrete or experiential and away from the more abstract, and to a further trend towards interaction but away from number. We have here a selective account of vocabulary and grammar, but it includes a sufficient number of words and grammatical features to make the points. The general cohesion is apparent.

PITJANTJATJARA AND DEGREES OF ABSTRACTION

Lexical data

A number of lexical features of the Pitjantjatjara language contribute to a generally concrete tone.

Definite and indefinite articles

There is no indefinite article in Pitjantjatjara, but the word *panya* functions at times as a kind of definite article. It covers some of the same meaning. You can say both:

wati	'man' (introducing an existential tone)
wati panya	'the man referred to'

but you cannot say 'a man'.

In association with this, Pitjantjatjara often uses pronouns, including the use of *panya* as a pronoun, when English would use the articles:

wati nyara	'that man' (distant or when unsure of precise identity)
wati pala	'that man' (near, specific person)
wati panya	'the man referred to or understood' (see above)

The absence of the indefinite article combined with such linguistic practice promotes specificity or the concrete and works against generality.

Infinitive

The verb is not found in the infinitive form but only with a subject, either stated or implied, as for instance with the imperative *ngalya-pitja* 'come here'. Verbal concepts, therefore, lack the conceptual 'freedom' of an infinitive form, being anchored to a specific, concrete subject.

Doing and being

Pitjantjatjara has no generic term for activity, no word for 'do'; thus verbs must be concretely specified. Similarly, no word is limited to the general concept of 'being'. Nevertheless, three words appear to convey this notion but have a little additional content:

nyinanyi	'sit'
ngaṟanyi	'stand'
ngarinyi	'lie'

These words are used according to context; thus a person may sit, stand or lie, but a road can only lie. None of these words indicates action, such as that of sitting down or of standing up, but they state that there the subject 'sits, stands or lies'. (These words have additional functions; for instance, used with the negative root of a verb they indicate tense.)

In short, in the notions both of 'doing' and 'being', a concrete or specific element is present.

Learning, teaching and knowing

In Pitjantjatjara the concepts of learning, teaching and knowing all accent the experiential and concrete but exclude the more abstract. There are two aspects to consider and they are covered by different vocabulary. In the first place, two words and a suffix are important for the concept of learning:

ninti	'knowledgeable, knowing'
ngurpa	'ignorant'
-ringanyi	'become' (present indicative)

If a person is asked to do something that he/she has not done before, such as enquire for films at the railway station, the individual may well claim ignorance. This was the response of one young woman, but she did not refer to lack of ability to do the job nor to lack of knowledge about how to do it. That could not have been the point, for she often picked up things for her own family. This, however, was the first time she had been asked

to collect the films and before she did so, she described herself as ignorant. Later, when she brought them back, she was knowledgeable. On another occasion, a kangaroo was being prepared for cooking and the time came to singe the fur from the carcass. A young woman of approximately 21 years of age, the mother of a toddler, was told to throw the kangaroo on the fire. She must have seen that done many times, but this was the first time she had been asked to do it. Greatly pleased, as I thought, she did as she was told, and then came across to talk. 'Previously', she said, 'I was ignorant (*ngurpa*), but now I am knowledgeable (*ninti*)'. The thing had to be done, known in actual experience, in order to be known. In this case, mere mental knowledge about something is not regarded as knowing.

The same type of thing applies to eating and drinking. A person is ignorant, *ngurpa*, of a particular type of food or drink until he/she has partaken of it; after this experience the person is *ninti*. A man who has not previously drunk alcohol will sit near relatives who are drinking. The drinkers say they know from this action that he wants to learn to drink and, by giving him the wine, they teach him. The teacher offers the wine and gives the person the experience. Again, if a non-drinker is offered wine and does not wish to drink it, he can refuse without giving offence by professing ignorance. As one man said, 'You can get out of it like this. You say, "My father gave me meat and bush food. My mother gave me water, different kinds of bush food, and breast milk. But they did not give me wine. I am ignorant" '. In this case also, experience is an essential element of learning, teaching and knowing.

Both *ninti* and *ngurpa* are found in a verbal form also, for instance with the suffix *-ringanyi* 'become'. This is added to nouns and adjectives that end in a vowel to form intransitive verbs:

ngulu	'frightened'
nguluringanyi	'become frightened'

Or in the case in point:

ninti	'knowledgeable'
nintiringanyi	'become knowledgeable' or 'learn'

The second translation 'learn' is misleading because it introduces an alien concept. This is because in English 'learning' has both transitive and intransitive aspects. In Pitjantjatjara the word is intransitive only and takes the genitive. For instance:

Ngayulu	*maiku*	*ninti.*	(*-ku* genitive)
I	vegetable food	knowledgeable	

'I know about vegetable food (transitive)' or
'I am knowledgeable of vegetable food (intransitive)'

Ngayulu	*maiku*	*nintiringanyi.*
I	vegetable food	become knowledgeable

'I learn about vegetable food (transitive)' or
'I become knowledgeable of vegetable food (intransitive)'

Both transitive and intransitive renderings are possible in English, but the intransitive only is used in Pitjantjatjara.

The same difficulty occurs with *ngurpa*; thus *ngurparinganyi* is not rightly translated 'forget', but instead should be 'become ignorant'.[1] The essential difference is between knowledge or ignorance *about* something and knowledge or ignorance *of* it. Knowledge, learning and experiencing are, therefore, interrelated as is teaching and making the experience possible.

The following incident supports this understanding of the Aboriginal concepts. One day an Aboriginal woman expressed dissatisfaction about the cleaner's job at the school. As we have seen, this job was often held by an Aboriginal woman but sometimes a white had the work. On this particular day the woman complained that white children were being taught to work at the school, but Aboriginal children were not. Enquiry elicited the fact that the cleaning job had been given to two of the white school girls. The complaint was not that the white children were earning money that Aboriginal children might have had nor was there a complaint when a white woman had the work. The dissatisfaction was directed specifically to the fact that the Aboriginal youngsters were not learning to work, that they were not being taught to work while whites were. The school teacher, it seems, could teach children to work only if he gave them actual work to do under genuine conditions of employment. This was the way adult Aborigines learned their skills, that is, by working for an employer.

The importance of experiencing, associated with devaluation of mental knowledge, is present also in respect of 'becoming ignorant'. This is said to occur when a particular activity is not carried out. The necessary information is remembered but, when it is not used, a person 'becomes ignorant'. This increasing ignorance can be accompanied by weakness, not physical but lack of authority.

All of these examples accent the intransitive and experiential against transitive concepts and indicate the constraint necessarily placed on the content of what can be taught, learned and known. There is, however, a second aspect to consider.

Two Pitjantjatjara verbs, both of them transitive, are glossed 'teach'. One of these uses the root *ninti*:

nintini	'teach'
(*ninti* 'know', *-ni* 'make')	
tjakultjunanyi	'teach'

At first sight the Pitjantjatjara concept is the same as that of English but, when we examine what is taught, a difference is apparent. Firstly, any reasoning uses one step only and generally the content of teaching can be physically demonstrated. In other words, the verbalising is no more than one step removed from the actual. For instance, people are taught what is socially acceptable by precept and example.

Other writers note a similar practice. Stanner, for instance, had difficulty when

attempting to clarify his data. He found that elderly Murinbata objected to certain questions about their tradition. Their stories, they held, were true, and features of the countryside were there to prove it. There, for instance, was the groove in the rock made by a totemic ancestor with his spear (Stanner 1966:159). As this example shows, myths are recounted in an oral transmission of believed fact and their veracity is attested by physical detail.

The kinship system provides another illustration, but differs in a significant respect. While kinship can be taught orally and visibly demonstrated through known persons, sometimes teaching is not limited to this. One day a middle-aged woman was giving me details of her own family when I asked about a particular relationship. She at once said that that person was dead. I apologised, but explained that I was not thinking about actual people, whereupon she had no difficulty and spoke freely without apparent embarrassment. Later, her daughter, a woman of about thirty years, came past and stopped to listen. She at once objected saying that that person was deceased, although we were not using Christian names but, instead, relationship terms. Her mother explained that she was teaching me the *tjukurpa* and the daughter had no difficulty in accepting the explanation.

While it was impossible to discern how much of the teaching was conveyed in abstract terms alone and how many of the relationship slots were filled in the women's minds with actual people, the fact remains that they were able to refer to what they were doing as the *tjukurpa* and one slot at least was not filled by a living person. Nevertheless, while the kinship system forms a network that covers the whole social universe, at every point it is attached directly, or is potentially attached directly, to the actual. For this reason, even if we decide that the women were using abstract notions only, without mental reference to people, the abstractions still did not move more than one step from the specific reality of their experience.

It must be remembered too that often in day-to-day affairs Aborigines do not use names, even to the point where they can no longer recall what these are. They have great facility, therefore, in use of kinship terms and it is impossible to tell whether real people are in mind. Nevertheless, the example given describes the only occasion on which I was given abstract instruction. In every other case, although using kinship terminology, speakers gave concrete examples, naming either individuals or listing individuals, all of whom were, say, brother-in-law or sister to the one speaking.

In short, the Pitjantjatjara concepts of learning, teaching, knowing and ignorance accent the experiential, and all of them are linked directly to the concrete. So also is the content, for it is either concrete fact (so or believed so) or abstract fact, removed one step only from what can be perceived through the senses. The English concepts, while including the concrete notions, incorporate also the more abstract ideas and the theoretical. As such they are free of the concretely real.

This discussion of teaching and learning would not be complete without a reference to the context in which Pitjantjatjara education occurs, and the examples given draw out the relevant features. In the matter of film collection, cooking the kangaroo, cleaning the school and drinking, education occurred in the context of everyday events and, necessarily, what was learned had immediate relevance to those events. This contextualised type of education characterises Pitjantjatjara teaching and learning in general. The same kind of teaching is found also in western society: many a child learned to cook by helping its

mother. Nevertheless, most education in western society occurs in a contrived or formal context, including the teaching of practical skills as in apprenticeship training. Teaching such as this is decontextualised; it does not have immediate relevance to the day's affairs and is directed towards future events. Harris noted this same type of contrast between Aboriginal and western teaching styles during work in Arnhem Land (Harris 1984:88 ff.). In a word, Aborigines favour the concretely real context for teaching whereas Westerners often use a theoretical or contrived type of context unrelated to present events.

Authority

Aboriginal and western concepts of authority differ not so much in the notion *per se* but in ideas about the basis on which authority rests and how it is exercised. Aborigines derive authority from:

- being knowledgeable, acquired by learning;
- expertise or skill;
- relationship.

At first sight there is nothing here that differs from western concepts, but there are two major contrasts embedded in it. First, since authority is linked to the concepts of teaching and learning, the Pitjantjatjara notion depends on the concrete and experiential but not on theoretical instruction or knowledge. The individual acquires authority and relevance through experiencing, by taking part in action both secular and sacred; by passing through initiation; by being present when particular events occur and thus taking part in them; through knowledge of fact or of believed fact, both what is concretely so and at the first degree of abstraction.[2] Westerners confer authority in similar fashion but, unlike Pitjantjatjara, confer it also on the basis of theoretical knowledge and skill.

Second, authority rests on relationship. That is so among both Aborigines and whites, and when it is so based, authority is exercised in terms of that relationship. In addition, Westerners, but not Aborigines, confer certain authority according to role, for instance in the bureaucratic system. Those who fill these roles are required to act with impartiality. This notion of impartiality depends on generality and thus implies that there is no direct link with the concrete. By contrast, the traditional Aboriginal social system depends wholly on relationships to particular people, particular land, and to particular totems. It thus depends on partiality and specificity.

These considerations underlie Pitjantjatjara authority, providing the basis for its acquisition, retention and use. Contrast is present with the western ideas through the absence in Pitjantjatjara, but the presence in English, of more abstract notions. As with teaching, learning and knowing, there is overlap between Aboriginal and western concepts, but on comparing the notions of authority we find that Pitjantjatjara speakers prefer concrete notions while English speakers use also the second degree abstractions.

Relative to learning by experiencing, it is significant that no one can fail in having an experience, nor can they simulate one. Such considerations accent the importance of taking part in events, both sacred and profane, and underline the significance of waiting for

invitation. If a person does not wait, putting himself forward, he makes himself the boss and, by having the experience, acquires authority at the expense of others, again a notion dependent on concrete thought.

Thinking, listening and heeding

There is no way to differentiate the concepts of thinking, listening and heeding in Pitjantjatjara. The same verb *kulini* does duty for all. This may be an important feature, for thinking originates in the self, but one listens to, or pays attention to or heeds, something that originates in the other. This feature suggests that the psychical and the physical, the self and the environment, are not fully distinguished from one another, a characteristic noted by Piaget in connection with pre-operatory thought.

Grammatical data

All of the grammatical material described in this section are interrelated and demonstrate a direct link with the concrete.

Conditional sentences

In Pitjantjatjara, conditionality is emphasised by the use of the suffix *-mpa* 'if'.[3] This conjunction is used in several different types of conditional sentence: in simple conditional statements (a–c), contrafactual conditional statements (d), and in statements of habit and custom (e).

Simple conditional sentences have to do with the real or with what is believed to be so. Knowing where a waterhole or soakage is, knowing animal habits and seeing a track, one can advance a point of view and make a deduction:

(a) *Maḷu* *iluringkulampa* *nyarakutu* *anu.*
kangaroo having been thirsty if there to went
'If the kangaroo was thirsty, it went that way.'

Knowing that water is tainted and the recognised result when it is drunk, you may say:

(b) *Mina kura* *tjikiṛampa* *pikatjararingkuku.*
water bad having drunk if will become sick
'If (he/she) drinks the polluted water, (he/she) will get sick.'

There is no suggestion here that anyone will actually drink the water, but the consequences of such drinking are stated.

(c) *Nyuntuṇin* *mani* *ungkunyangkampa*
you (sing.) me you money having given if

ngayulu *loada pulka* *nyuntumpa* *ngalya* *katiku.*
I load big your here will bring
'If you give me money, I will bring-cart your big-heavy load here.'

Again, a concrete condition is advanced for what will follow, although the speaker does not know whether or not the money will be forthcoming.

(d) *Ankulampana* *tjitji* *nyangama.*
having gone if I child would have seen
(continuous imperative)
'If I had gone I would have seen the child.'
(but I did not go and I did not see it)

Contrafactual conditional sentences such as this reverse known facts, in both the subordinate and main clauses, and by so doing make an abstraction from reality. Nevertheless the content of contrafactual sentences does not break free from the real but remains tied directly to it. While, therefore, the sentence appears to have the structural form necessary for hypothesis, it is not a purely hypothetical statement but uses first degree abstraction only.

Sometimes when one is out in the bush with Aboriginal people, they tell you about habit and custom. In this case, if a conditional construction is used, then the subordinate conditional clause is the same as those above. They may point out a depression in the sand which marks an old soakage in a dry creek bed and tell you:

(e) *Iluringkulampan* *pitingka* *tjawalpai.*
having become thirsty if you hole in dig
'If you get thirsty, (you) dig in the hole (for water).'

With the subordinate clause of condition, a common daily occurrence is raised and the main clause sets out related traditional custom. At the same time, while the reference is to something that is habitual or customary, it is not actually happening and may never happen, at least not in that place. To that extent the idea is imaginary; nevertheless it remains tied to the real and requires a low order of abstraction only. In this respect it resembles the contrafactual sentence above, which is also imaginary and which likewise remains linked directly to the real.

Hypothetical conditional sentences

Another form of conditional sentence is that of hypothesis, and the topic requires considerable discussion. The hypothetical conditional sentence is not found in Pitjantjatjara. In Pitjantjatjara one cannot put forward a purely hypothetical condition, something that is merely possible, or a supposition. In practice, when Westerners attempt to do so, the Aboriginal person receives the idea as a fact. One cannot, therefore, advance a purely hypothetical proposition such as:

Nganaṇa	*Alice Springsalakutu*	*ankulampa*	*weeki munkara.*
we	Alice Springs to	having going if	week other side

'If we were to go to Alice Springs next week we would. . .'

Instead the statement is received by the Pitjantjatjara listener as:

'When we go to Alice Springs next week. . .'
or 'Since-as we are going to Alice Springs next week. . .'

As a result, the direct link with reality is retained. Several linguistic factors and a feature of Aboriginal custom appear to be contributory and we look at them now.

Linguistic and other factors that affect hypothesis

In conditional sentences, three linguistic factors and Aboriginal custom appear to support the retention of a direct link with reality and so adversely affect the severance of that link. In considering these things it is helpful first of all to define the term 'hypothesis'. Two meanings from *The Pocket Macquarie Dictionary* give hypothesis as a

> proposition, idea, theory or other statement adopted as a starting point for discussion, investigation, study, etc; statement accepted as basic in an argument.

In one of its definitions *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* adds a little explicit detail, drawing out a significant feature. This dictionary gives the meaning of hypothesis as:

> Supposition made as basis for reasoning, without assumption of its truth, or as starting point for investigation. . .

We note that an hypothesis is simply an idea or supposition put forward as the basis for a discussion or argument or investigation, and for these purposes its truth (or falsity) is irrelevant.

In order to more precisely delineate the point at issue, it is useful to observe that when a measure of probability (from unlikely to likely) is introduced, then a direct link exists with the real. Statements of probability are not, therefore, truly hypothetical as that has been defined. In their case, the event referred to, in varying degree, is held to be likely to happen or the statement is expected to prove true. Truth and likelihood, however, are irrelevant for the purely hypothetical or the merely possible although integral to probability.

Having defined hypothesis, we look at related linguistic factors. Attention will be directed to the subordinate clause of condition (the protasis) and not to the main or consequent clause (apodosis). We first examine the verb.

The verbal form used in conditional clauses in Pitjantjatjara has no English equivalent. It occurs not only in conditional constructions but also in many other types of subordinate adverbial clauses, such as those of time, and of reason and cause. This verb has no tense affixation, that information being provided by the main clause of the sentence. There are two types of this verb: in the one, the subjects of main and subordinate clauses are the same,

but in the other they are different—a contrast that is reflected in the final suffix of the verb (see examples above). In their handbook on the Pitjantjatjara language, Eckert and Hudson do not refer to the distinction drawn here, but they describe the two types of verb, referring to the first as secondary and to the others as circumstantial (Eckert and Hudson 1988:218-23). It is important to note that the same form of verb is used in all Pitjantjatjara conditional constructions.

In English conditional sentences, pure hypothesis can be achieved in either of two ways: (a) by use of a verb in the subjunctive mood in the protasis (subordinate clause) of a conditional sentence; and (b) knowing from the context that a statement is merely propositional, a hypothetical condition can be advanced using the indicative mood in the protasis:

> If we were to go to Alice Springs next week we would. . .
> We might go to Alice Springs next week. If we go we would. . .

These statements will be understood simply as ideas, or propositions put forward merely for discussion. To show their hypothetical nature, the first sentence depends more on structure, having that feature encoded in the verb, but the second depends on context.

When we consider Pitjantjatjara, it is at once apparent that the first way of hypothesis is not available, since the same verb form is used in all clauses of condition. Importantly, the verb provides no means of separating the real from what is simply an idea.

Again, in order to make the point at issue quite clear, it is useful to look briefly at another Aboriginal language, Yanyuwa, spoken in the area of Borroloola, Northern Territory. This language uses a verb suffix *-njima/-yima* (basic morpheme/allomorph) to show that the event referred to is not happening—it is unreal in that sense. The suffix is used, for instance, when referring to the habitual and customary (Kirton, pers. comm). Kirton provides a number of examples:[4]

'*Kurdardi*	*kanda-wingka-yima*	*rra-nhanawe*	*baj-inju. . .*'
not	she-go-neg:pres	f-woman	there:def-to
'Women don't go to that place.'			

In one discourse, the Yanyuwa speaker has the linguist asking her a question:

'*Murruwarra,*	*namba*	*karna-wingka-yima*	*munjimunji,. . .*'
Cousin	if/when	I-go-hyp	bush:bush. . .
'Cousin, if I should go in the bush,. . .'			

'*Namba*	*ka-wingka-yima*	*munjimunji,. . .*'
if	you-go-hyp	bush:bush. . .
'If you should go in the bush,. . .'		

and the informant went on to describe how to get water from trees, pointing out at the same time that this might not be successful:

'Namba	*kurdardi,*	*ka-wingka-yima,*	*kinya-nga-njima'*
if	not	you-go-hyp	it:you-see-hyp

nya-mangaji	*jilili,. . .*	*ka-mulantha-yima. . .*
m-that:def.	spring	you-dig-hyp

'if not [finding water], you should go, you should see that spring,. . .you should dig (for water). . .'

In the above sentences, the suffix *-njima/-yima* is given either of two glosses: 'negative present' in the first example and 'hypothetical' in the conditional constructions. That second gloss suggests the use of a verb in the subjunctive mood and, therefore, a purely imaginary statement, one that has broken the link with the concretely real. On the other hand, although the suffix modifies the verb so that it contrasts with the indicative, it shows only that the event described is not presently occurring or that it does not happen. To say that is not the same as saying the event is merely hypothetical, an hypothesis or simply an idea. The critical distinction, that between the real and pure idea, is not made. From the perspective of the present work, therefore, the gloss 'negative present' is to be preferred. In support of this we note that the conjunction *namba* is sometimes glossed 'if' and sometimes 'if-when'. As a result, in this context, by introducing 'when', the real is favoured but not the merely propositional. The Yanyuwa statement like the Pitjantjatjara retains a direct link with reality. A description is given of traditional practice, in particular circumstances, but no hypothetical idea is advanced.

Returning now to the Pitjantjatjara, we have found that the first means of hypothesis is not available. We look, therefore, at the second method, and to do this examine first the conjunctions and then the context.

Conjunctions introduce subordinate adverbial clauses, establishing the relationship between the subordinate and main clauses of a sentence. While that point is easily made, the topic of conjunctions is not easy in Pitjantjatjara; for one thing, there are few explicit forms. Many, such as 'when', 'as' and 'since', remain implicit. The significance of this feature of Pitjantjatjara becomes apparent as we examine the question of hypothesis.

As we have seen, the conjunction necessary for a conditional sentence is present in Pitjantjatjara, the suffix *-mpa* 'if'. Nevertheless, as also noted, when a Westerner uses this suffix to advance what is merely an idea, his/her listeners treat the statement as fact. Accordingly, what is intended as, for instance, 'If you were to get the money. . .' is received as either 'When you get the money. . .' *or* 'As-since you are getting the money. . .'

Whichever version may be correct, certainly the statement is not treated as supposition or even as a simple conditional clause. In practice, the lack of commitment, which characterises most conditional utterances, simply disappears, to be replaced by presumed fact. The event is accompanied, therefore, by a change in the relationship of the subordinate and main clauses. In the absence of some overt forms, that change is perhaps more readily understood by Aborigines than by non-Aboriginal speakers of the language. In English, any such shift in relationship would usually require an alteration in the conjunctions, such as that noted. Nevertheless, it is not always so, and this raises the question of the context of an utterance.

As already noted, context is integral to the second way of advancing a hypothetical condition. In the conditional constructions it is significant also in relation to fact. While in most conditional sentences there is no certainty that a specified condition will be met, sometimes, as the context of the utterance shows, the condition is already satisfied:

I'm going to town tomorrow.
If you are going, I'll go too.

In that case, 'if' is very close to 'as' or 'since', both of which, without assistance from the context, show what Quirk and Greenbaum refer to as 'fulfilled condition' (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973:327). It appears that what is intended by the Westerner as hypothesis is received by Pitjantjatjara speakers in this light:

As you are going, I'll go too.
Since you are going, I'll go too.

The above explanation focuses attention on the context of English conditional constructions. What effect does the context have in Pitjantjatjara? In answering this question, one significant linguistic feature provides a lead by introducing the question of supposition.

In Pitjantjatjara there is no word for the English 'suppose', no way to advance a supposition. Instead, speakers use either of two forms: (a) the word *kulini* 'think' can be used. In this case, the subject either thinks correctly or makes a mistake; (b) alternatively, the post position *palku* is used:

(a) *Ngayulu* *kulinu*
I thought. . .

Ngayulu *ngunti* *kulinu*
I false thought
'I thought (but) in error. . .'

(b) *palku* 'as if', 'thinking it to be', 'mistaking it for'

Ngayulu *tjiṭutja* *palku kulinu*
I dog as if thought
'I thought it was a dog.'

Neither of these forms is supposition, for either the content of the subject's thought is acceptable or an error or doubt is acknowledged. By contrast, a supposition as such is valid, although what is supposed may or may not be correct. In other words, in the Pitjantjatjara, the direct link with reality is retained.

The above observations show that supposition is not congenial to Pitjantjatjara speakers. As a result, they are oriented away from mere ideas or hypothetical propositions and towards the real. If that be so, then it suggests that the second method of hypothesis

will not be used, not because of a linguistic barrier as occurred with the first method, but for reasons to do with culture and the general orientation of Pitjantjatjara thinking. In other words, Pitjantjatjara thinking will favour the fulfilled condition. We look a little more closely, therefore, at the everyday use made by Westerners of hypothetical utterances.

Westerners often make hypothetical conditional statements using one or other of the two ways noted. They then use their hypothesis as the basis for discussion, at the same time avoiding commitment either one way or the other. In this way, they freely discuss what is known to be merely proposition, or supposition, and frequently do so, particularly in relation to planning. It is often in this kind of context that they attempt to raise propositions with Aborigines, as the above examples reflect. They say, for instance, 'If you were to get the money. . .' or 'If you get the money. . .' , and they then go on to discuss what might eventuate. Discussion of the matter, however, seems to influence Aborigines to anchor what is said in the real. Discussion itself seemingly injects commitment into what is intended as a hypothetical proposition.

This view received support during a conversation I had about two years ago with an Aborigine fluent in English, a Walmajarri woman from the Kimberley region in Western Australia. In response to a question from me, my companion reiterated several times that Aboriginal people always talk about what is real. She added that Aboriginal men think white men are children because they do not always do so, and concluded her remarks with the comment, 'White men are liars'. I have heard the same adverse assessment of whites from Pitjantjatjara at Aputula following discussions with government. While these discussions are often of an exploratory nature on the part of government officials, what is said is received as a promise by Aborigines. Not infrequently they have said, 'But he promised. . .' and I have been unable to convince them that such was not the case. In the absence of hypothesis, that misunderstanding can be readily understood.

In short, the absence of hypothesis has been reported, and in support of that observation a cluster of contributory factors have been discussed. We have noted the use of only one form of verb in conditional clauses, and we have examined Pitjantjatjara use of conjunctions and noted a general orientation towards the real but away from pure hypothesis. The presence of this orientation was suggested by certain cross-cultural communication problems and supported by linguistic evidence, notably by the absence in Pitjantjatjara of supposition. Lastly, according to western culture, the context of an utterance is often important in framing hypothetical statements and sometimes in framing factual ones. Among Pitjantjatjara, discussion endorses the real. That assessment was supported by evidence from a traditional Aborigine from Western Australia. For all of these features, all of which have bearing on conditional constructions, there is no means to separate what is merely an idea from what is tied to reality. We conclude therefore that in clauses of condition, Pitjantjatjara use abstractions of the first degree, for instance in contrafactual statements and in those about habit and custom, but they do not use the second degree abstractions necessary for hypothesis.

The above examination of hypothesis has required some rather detailed discussion. Nevertheless, the topic, although difficult, is important in showing a Pitjantjatjara preference for retaining a link with reality.

Why questions and because statements

A feature of language important for questioning is the meaning of 'why'. In Pitjantjatjara this is either *nyaaku* (with emphasis on final cause) or *nyaanguru* (introducing efficient cause):

nyaa-ku	*nyaa-nguru*
what-for (gen.)	what-from

In practice, 'why' questions asked by whites often elicit purpose or final cause statements from Aborigines, although this is by no means always the case. When efficient cause answers are given, the content is always the actual or the believed actual and, if in abstract terms, then an abstraction of the first degree. This tactic maintains the direct link to the concrete.

(1) *Nyaaku-n hospitalakutu ananyi?*
why you hospital to going
'Why are you going to the hospital?'

Tjitji ngayuku nyakunytjikitja.
child my to see
'To see my child.'

or

Tjitji ngayuku pikatjara ngarinyangka.
child my sick having been
'Because my child is sick.'

(2) *Nyaaku-n alatji palyaṇi?*
why you thus making?
'Why are you making (it) like that?'

Tjukurpa nyara
tjukurpa that
'That's *tjukurpa.*' (showing its nature—that's the way it is)

(3) *Nyaanguṛu iṭi ulanyi?*
why baby crying?
'Why is the baby crying?'

Ipiku or *Iluringkula*
'For milk.' 'Because (it's) thirsty.'

Responses to these 'why' questions introduce the next word, 'because'.

A concept related to 'why' is that of 'because'. Pitjantjatjara makes much use of participles where English uses a clause introduced either by 'because' or by some conjunction having temporal meaning, for example 'when', 'while', 'after'.

Watingku	*maḷu*	*nyangu*	*pilunpa*	*paṭaṛa.*
man	kangaroo	saw	quietly	waited/waiting

'The man saw the kangaroo because he waited quietly.'
'. . .having waited quietly'
'. . .while waiting quietly'[5]

We have here a means of stating efficient cause, a feature of formal thought as described by Piaget, but as in conditional sentences, the content of responses to 'why' questions retains a direct link with the concrete here and now.

Generalisation

Pitjantjatjara speakers make generalisations, such as those of the kinship system and those that have to do with totemic belief. These things we have seen. There are also some generic terms such as *kuka* 'meat', *mai* 'vegetable food, bread', *maku* 'witchetty and other edible grubs'. All these abstractions are of the first degree.[6] On the other hand, certain types of generalisation are not found. For one thing, there is no equivalent for the English indefinite article 'a', noted above. Again, there are no terms for the indefinite pronouns such as 'someone', 'anyone', 'whoever', although demonstrative pronouns abound. On this question it could be argued that the form *kutjupa* 'another' means also 'someone, anyone'.

Kutjupa	*ngurakutu*	*anu.*
another	camp to	went

'Another (person) went to camp.'
'Someone went to camp.'

With the last of these translations there is a move from the adjective 'another' to the more abstract pronoun 'someone'. That shift is acceptable in English but its appropriateness must be questioned for Pitjantjatjara. While to some extent the translation used may be a matter of personal preference, if we are to stay as close as possible to the Aboriginal thought, then the link with the real should be retained. The same type of problem occurs with abstract nouns. There are few of these nouns in Pitjantjatjara although the related verbs are present. For instance, there is a verb *mukuringanyi* 'love' but the more abstract form, the noun 'love', is not traditionally available. With the verb, specificity is always present, for there must be at least a subject to the sentence and often who loves whom must be given as well (see Bain & Sayers 1990). All these features are antithetical to the formulation of purely general statements.

Lastly there is no way in Pitjantjatjara to derive a principle and to advance the proposition 'It depends on. . .' Instead, Pitjantjatjara speakers give alternatives, saying for instance, 'Some do; some don't'. That form is common.

In all of these ways Pitjantjatjara retains the direct link with the real.

Alternatives and possibilities

We have just noted the common use of alternatives such as 'maybe I will—maybe I won't'. In what is perhaps a related feature, there are no terms in Pitjantjatjara equivalent to the English 'or', 'either. . .or', and 'neither. . .nor'. The term *munta* is in some ways similar to 'or' but it is often used also when an English speaker would say 'Sorry'. There is thus in Pitjantjatjara a sense in which alternatives are not equally valid. This lack of equality marks a signifiant difference between Pitjantjatjara and English linguistic practice.

Of even greater significance is the absence of the terms 'either. . .or', 'neither. . .nor'. The lack of these forms with the absence of hypothesis and supposition affects the character of Aboriginal discussion and decision making. One effect is to make it difficult for Aborigines to consider alternatives and possibilities as a kind of array: either this, or that, or the other. With the 'either-or' type of structure, possibilities can be looked at individually, while holding others in abeyance; they can be examined relative to each other and, finally, a decision can be reached based on the general assessment. In this way all ideas and their possible consequences are taken into account. An example from my own experience will help to explain the Pitjantjatjara procedure:

> One day a surgeon at the Alice Springs hospital asked me [Bain] to speak with an Aboriginal woman patient. She had grossly infected bone in the forearm and was facing surgery. The surgeon hoped to save the arm but was concerned lest the infection spread above the elbow and, if that seemed likely, wanted permission to amputate below the joint. During a visit to my friend I introduced the topic. Since in Pitjantjatjara one cannot say, 'The sickness is either spreading or not', I used the only form available to introduce the two ideas: 'Might be the sickness is spreading; might be it isn't'. At the time, of course, no one knew the real state of affairs and both ideas were merely hypothetical. First we discussed briefly the more hopeful possibility based on 'If the sickness isn't spreading. . .' I then tried to introduce the less favourable alternative, its possible consequences and what might be done about that. 'Perhaps the sickness is spreading. If that is happening, what do you think? Is it good perhaps for the doctor to cut off that arm (below the elbow)?' The response was immediate and two-fold: the woman rejected any thought of amputation and she returned to the first possibility. As several attempts to reintroduce the subject proved, she would not, at any rate did not, entertain the second idea even for a moment. We need not doubt that she was faced with something frightening. At the same time, given the second circumstance, amputation early rather than late did have something to be said for it and was worth considering. My friend, however, gave no opportunity at all to discuss the idea and if I tried to do so, drew the conversation straight back to a favourable prognosis.

Brief examination of Aboriginal practice shows that first, purely hypothetical or suppositional statements were not possible:

> if-suppose the sickness is not spreading. . .
> if-suppose the sickness is spreading. . .

Second, even if these hypotheses could have been advanced, in the absence of 'either. . .or' there was no way to reach a conclusion based on an assessment of both possibilities.

In the event, having looked at the first idea, having discussed it, what was introduced as mere hypothetical possibility became reality: the 'if' became 'since' and conditionality was lost:

since the sickness is not spreading. . .

Having reached that point, the alternative was no longer a valid idea and logically there was no reason to consider it. In short, the ideas were not looked at individually, were not assessed relative to each other, and the decision was based on a one-sided or limited view of the situation.

We have acknowledged already that fear no doubt played a major role; nevertheless, in the absence of the necessary constructions, a discussion of the type attempted is unlikely or indeed not possible.

In a possibly related linguistic feature, there is no word in Pitjantjatjara for 'choose'. English speakers use the word *ngurkantananyi* which is rightly translated 'discerning' (present indicative). The absence of the verb 'choose' appears to be congruent with the absence of a means to express 'or' and with the other problems outlined above concerning alternatives.

PITJANTJATJARA AND INTERACTION

The following linguistic examples suggest that Pitjantjatjara speakers recognise and value interaction, a process that requires a pair of opposing entities. The evidence is of two kinds: first, there appears to be a measure of emphasis on pairing, or binary opposition, the necessary condition for interactional process, and second, several features of the language incorporate a notion of reciprocity.

Binary opposition

Kinship and kinship terminology

Aboriginal social structure is founded solely on kinship. Kin relationship always implies some kind of paired 1:1 association of opposing entities, such as mother/daughter, mother's brother/sister's son. These binary oppositions form a complex network that extends throughout a given Aboriginal community and, importantly, between the 'members' of the pairs reciprocal interaction occurs. Since the terminology of classificatory kinship reflects a group's social structure, so also it is in keeping with the interactional process occurring within it. For instance, Pitjantjatjara terminology is congruent with Pitjantjatjara social structure and with it, the binary oppositions and interactions important to the people. The same is so of Aranda terminology. Some of the Pitjantjatjara terms are as follows:

mama	'father, father's brother'
ngunytju	'mother, mother's sister'
kuṭa	'older brother' 'father's older brother's son'
kangkuṛu	'older sister' 'mother's older sister's daughter'
maḷanypa	'younger brother, younger sister' 'father's younger brother's son or daughter' 'mother's younger sister's son or daughter'
kuri	'spouse'
kuri inkaṇi	'person one could have married but did not' (Eligibility is determined by kinship; for instance, a woman's husband's brother; man's wife's sister; woman's sister's husband; man's brother's wife. Often the term *inkani* is dropped and the person is referred to simply as *kuri*.)

Terms for in-laws are reciprocal:

mingkayi	'girl's mother-in-law/father-in-law' 'woman's daughter-in-law' 'man's daughter-in-law'
tjuwari	'husband's sister' 'brother's wife'

In short, since the kinship system provides the basis for social interaction, a patterned reciprocity constantly effected throughout an Aboriginal community, kinship terminology necessarily reflects the network of binary, 1:1 oppositions important to the people and the overall interactional aspect of social behaviour.

Number; numerical terms

Pitjantjatjara interest is in 1:1 (binary) opposition or opposing entities, not in counting:

kutju	'one'
kutjara	'two'
mankurpa	'three, few' (it is not specific)

kutjara kutjara	'four'
kutjara mankurpa	'five'
mankurpa mankurpa	'six'

There is some indication that the last three are additions following the introduction of European schooling in the 1940s.

Since only the terms for one and two are specific, effectively, counting is sufficient to establish 1:1 opposition and that is all.

The word *kutju* is used also to mean 'only' in a situation of opposition:

kuka kutju
'meat only'

This expression is found, for instance, in a situation when a variety of food is available, but a person may have eaten meat only. Again,

wati tjuṭa kutju
man plural only
'men only'

means that from a mixed group of people, men only are required to attend the hospital clinic or perhaps a ritual.

This lack of interest in number supports the epistemological analysis of chapter 3. It accents binary opposition, which is necessary for interaction or communication, and focuses attention away from quantification, which is integral to the western world view.

Comparatives

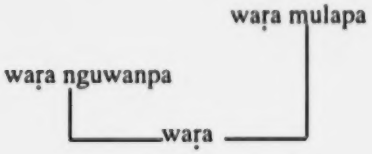
Formal comparatives are not present in Pitjantjatjara, which again supports the notion of dichotomy. Instead, comparative and superlative notions can be expressed by the use of adverbs that are modified to reflect degree: *mulapa* 'truly, very, most'; *nguwanpa* 'almost, more'.

tjuṭa	'plural'
tjuṭa mulapa	'very many'
waṛa	'long, tall'
waṛa mulapa	'very long, very tall' 'longest, tallest'

waṛa nguwanpa	'longer, taller' (literally 'long almost')

Another word, *pika*, expresses an extreme beyond that provided by *mulapa*. Degree is also achieved by intonation and by lengthening the syllables of the particular word stressed, for instance, by lengthening *mulapa*.

The use of the superlative 'longest, tallest' to translate *waṛa mulapa* must be questioned. *Waṛa* 'long' appears to be the base line, and by use of adverbs it is possible to take a single long, but not very long, step (*waṛa nguwanpa*) or a single much longer step (*waṛa mulapa*), as in the diagram below. An extremely long step can be taken by using *pika*. Steps of intermediate length would be possible by use of intonation. Comparison is between two lines, that of the base line and of one other. In English, comparison is possible between three items and two progressive steps can be taken from the base. This opens up additional logical possibility of the 'if. . .then' type: if A<B, B<C, then A<C. The connection between A and C is not direct but through a formal, logical progression.



Linguistically, the same possibility appears to be there in Pitjantjatjara. Nevertheless, since the formal comparatives are not present, Pitjantjatjara at least favours, and is probably limited to, comparison between the two items, with the adverbs showing no more than the degree of disparity.

Lastly, comparison is also possible by the use of words such as *puḷka* 'large, big'; *tjukutjuku* 'small, little'; and *muṭumuṭu* 'short'.

In all, this sets one against the other in a kind of dichotomy, in a pairing or opposition of two items, repeating a feature necessary for communication or interaction and working against quantification. Furthermore it favours retention of the link with the real and works against severance of that link.

Reciprocity and interaction

Having

In Pitjantjatjara the genitive is expressed by the suffix *-ku*, but the concept of possession, as it is understood in English, is substantially modified, or altered, when related elements are examined. The concept of 'having' in the sense of owning (the other) is not present. In English this is a transitive notion but in Pitjantjatjara the suffix *-tjara* is used and the thing 'owned' is conceived as a projection of the person or as an extension of his personality.

kuḷaṭa	'spear' (noun)
kuḷaṭatjara	'person with spear'
tjiṭutja	'dog'
tjiṭutjatjara	'person with dog'
pika	'illness, sore'
pikatjara	'sick person'
iṭi	'baby'
iṭitjara	'person with baby'
	'pregnant woman'

Conversely, to show that something is associated with a person, the terminology can be reversed: the dog (and the spear) is a *walytjatjara* (*walytja* 'relative, relation'). Consequently, 'owner' and 'owned' are in the *-tjara* relationship or association with each other, person to dog, dog to person.

The *-tjara* suffix is used also with things; for instance, a boomerang used extensively in beating out the rhythm during an *inma* 'ceremony' is an *inmatjara*, and, presumably referring to its wire handle, a billycan is always referred to as a *wayatjara*.

The suffix *-tjara*, then, is substantially different from the English 'having' and includes notions of reciprocity—an element of interaction. By comparison with western notions, it suggests a differently conceived relationship of person and thing, a different concept of the self and a different relationship between thing and thing.

Another word in Pitjantjatjara, *kanyini*, is closer to the English concept of 'having', but there is an aspect of looking after and of operating. This word does not present the thing as a projection of the person nor take up the notion of a reciprocal relationship between person and thing, contrasting in this with *-tjara*.

Watingku	*car*	*kanyini.*
man	car	drives

'The man drives the car.'

Minymangku	*piti*	*kanyini.*
woman	wooden dish	has

'The woman has a wooden dish.'

Paluṛu	*tjitji*	*kanyini.*
he/she	child	looks after/cares for

'He/she looks after, or cares for, the child.'

As these examples show, any concept of 'having' is infused with elements of a different kind. These inject some specificity into the more general notion of 'having' as

such, just as the Pitjantjatjara concept of 'being' includes more content than does English.

Considering these two possibilities, the *-tjara* relationship injects reciprocity between subject and object, supporting the idea of interaction, but the alternative, *kanyini*, infuses the notion of 'having' with additional specific concrete content.

Giving and receiving

Concepts derived from the *-tjara* relationship are reinforced by the syntax used with the verb *unganyi* 'give'. This is the only Pitjantjatjara verb to take two accusatives—both the thing given and the person to whom it is given[7]:

Minymangku	*kapi*	*tjitji*	*unganyi.*
woman	water	child	gives
(nom)	(acc)	(acc)	(present indicative)

'The woman gives water to the child.'

In this case, syntax makes no distinction between the thing given and the person to whom it is given, that is, the person who receives. This reinforces the idea derived from the *-tjara* concept that you cannot separate 'owner' and 'owned'; they stand in reciprocal relationship, the one a projection of the other.

Ngapartji

This is an abstract notion in Pitjantjatjara that incorporates something like interaction or communication, or reciprocity or mutual relevance. The word *ngapartji* modifies the verb, making it, in some sense, reciprocal. It has no direct counterpart in English although its meaning can be expressed by a phrase. Sometimes it appears to mean 'in turn, taking one's turn'. Its use is best shown by examples, firstly its use with transitive verbs:

wangkanyi	'talk' (present indicative)
ngapartji wangkanyi	'talk back and forth' 'talk in turn' (including question and answer)

The meaning shows interaction, with understanding, or communication between the parties. In the following example also, a necessary relationship with (one or more other drivers) is implied by the use of *ngapartji*:

Paluṛu	*trucka*	*kanyini.*
he	truck	drives

'He drives the truck.'

Paluṛu	*trucka*	*ngapartji*	*kanyini.*
he	truck	*ngapartji*	drives

'He drives the truck in turn.'
'He takes his turn driving the truck.'

The word *ngapartji* is used also with intransitive verbs, and again the presence or relevance of the other(s) is presupposed, as in the case of the truck driving:

pitjanyi	'come, am coming'
ngalya-pitjanyi	'coming here'
ngapartji pitjanyi	'coming to meet someone' 'coming towards someone'

Ngayulu	*ngapartji*	*pitjanyi*	*tjungu*	*ankunytjikitja.*
I	*ngapartji*	am coming	together	to go

'I come/am coming (to you) so that we can go together.'

A further example adds greater content. One day while talking of the need for ritual upkeep of the Aputula country, the Pitjantjatjara ritual leader spoke of himself and of the Southern Aranda leader: *ngali ngapartji nyinanyi*. This is difficult to put into English; *ngali* is 'we (two)' and *nyinanyi* can be translated as the verb 'be'. Thus in translating the sentence we can say, 'We (two) *ngapartji* are', and in free translation we have the statement:

'We (two) are relevant to one another (have relevance).'
'We (two) are in a state of relevance.'

While this can be said and comprehended in English, it is not easily done.

As the above examples show, translation of *ngapartji* depends, in part, on the verb with which it is used:

- it qualifies or modifies the verb;
- it shows the relevance between two things or people (state);
- it shows the relatedness of action, that is, it shows interaction.

The *ngapartji* concept, therefore, supports the idea that ritual action might be conceived as interaction—the notion is present in Pitjantjatjara thought.

Puṭu

The Pitjantjatjara word *puṭu* is a type of negative. It also modifies the verb, reversing its 'direction' or expressing the opposite meaning. It is best understood by illustration:

ngurini	'seek, look for'
puṭu ngurini	'unable to find'

unganyi	'give'
puṭu unganyi	'failure or inability to receive' (because the 'gift' was not given)

As shown, *puṭu* is used when an attempt has failed. In translation, English uses 'unable' but in addition must alter the verb itself. In the examples given, the change is from seek to find, from give to receive. The word *puṭu*, therefore, does more than negate the verb: from the English perspective, in one way or another, it reverses the action or direction of the action and then negates it.

In respect of verbs of action, then, these words *puṭu* and *ngapartji* show a kind of two-way or reciprocal aspect of the language. Likewise, in respect of people, species and things, of the 'owner' and 'owned', the *-tjara* concept does the same. Both in respect of verbs and of nouns, therefore, the Pitjantjatjara make positive use of the notion of reciprocity and of interaction; or, to put it another way, they make effective use of the model of communication.

PITJANTJATJARA AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Human beings and the natural environment

Properties of matter

Properties of matter recognised in western cultures, and reflected in English vocabulary, are not present in Pitjantjatjara in their nominal aspect but are found in their adjectival form only. They are recognised solely as quality. For instance, a person knows if he has a large or small billycan, but he has no word for quantity or volume, and the billycan is described as *puḷka* 'large' or *tjukutjuku* 'small'. Similarly, there is no word for 'weight' and while the English 'load' has been adopted into Pitjantjatjara, it is used to refer to items carried, not to their heaviness. In this context a load can be described as large or small and again attention is focused on the adjectival.

With respect to the related concept of power or strength, the position is rather different and difficult to resolve. The word *witulya* functions as an adjective, 'powerful', 'strong'; as an adverb, 'powerfully', 'strongly'; and, in taking the suffix *-tjara*, it functions as a noun: *witulyatjara* 'one with power' (see *-tjara* above).

Wati witulyatjara.
man one with power, strength
'The man is powerful.'

Inma witulyatjara.
ceremony one with power
'The ceremony is powerful.'

Trucka *witulyatjara.*
truck one with power
'The truck is powerful.'

There is some evidence, therefore, that Pitjantjatjara conceive power and the one who bears or wields it as separate entities, that power, as such, is recognised. Nevertheless, by comparison with English, use of the notion of power as a separate entity is restricted.[8]

These concepts support the analysis of Aboriginal epistemology in three respects. In the first place, if the *witulyatjara* concept identifies power in a nominal form, then at the same time it rules out any notion of magic. In that linguistic setting, power is present in its nominal aspect, but by use of the suffix *-tjara* some kind of fusion has occurred. The seeming separate entity, power, has become integral to the person who carries it. Since, therefore, power is something of the conceived self, an individual cannot be said to wield an impersonal force, such as magic. The powerful person, therefore, is no mere 'receptacle' (see p. 21), for his association with power is of a different kind.

Next, as noted, the physical properties of matter present in western epistemologies, nouns such as weight and volume, are not found in Pitjantjatjara. While that does not prove the totemic properties of people/matter/species were rightly identified, it at least holds the door open to that possibility and, therefore, to comparison between them and western notions. If that is allowed, the totemic and western conceptualisations could fill the same slot in their respective conceptual sets. From this perspective, if indirectly, the Pitjantjatjara language continues to support the epistemological analysis.

Lastly, linguistic examination provides a concept of power that gives positive support to the analysis. Consideration of Aboriginal epistemology resulted in the identification of unities, that is, groups of entities classified together in terms of an inherent totemic property, such as kangarooness. Since these properties are causative in nature, power itself is seen to be integral to, or a faculty of, each 'member' of a unity. This is echoed in the linguistic analysis, for by use of the form *witulyatjara*, power is present as a projection of, or integral to, that which bears it.

People and land

Another area of conceptualisation is the notion of self, not as a social being but relative to the rest of creation. In this, Aboriginal and western ideas differ markedly. One difference has been noted already, that shown through the *-tjara* concept. Another is present in the conceived association of a person with land, shown through the word *ngura* and through a word derived from it. There is no precise translation of *ngura* in English, but it is usually rendered 'country, camp, place, land'. It has two main conceptual areas, use of which depends on context, and it is the root of a significant sacred term. All of these meanings suggest Aboriginal conceptualisation of a person's relationship to land.

1. *ngura* as camp: 'one's usual or temporary place of residence, where one lives or is sleeping':

- Aputula as distinct from other places of settlement, such as Oodnadatta Ernabella, New Crown Cattle station;

- a particular place in Aputula as distinct from others;

- a temporary camping or living place, for instance, out bush or in a settled town, cattle station, or mission.

2. *ngura* as country: carries spiritual or sacred connotation and has always totemic reference:

- The place of birth of the individual is always referred to by the person as *ngura ngayuku* 'my country'.

- In a different context, where 'my country' is used more broadly, it can refer to the area that is significant to the people of my totem and patriline by contrast with the country of your totem and patriline. This country can be anything from a site to a constellation of sites or part of a totemic track; thus it may refer as well to 'our country'.

- Mother's, father's, grandparents' country is also important. Thus it is said, for instance, 'That is my country from my mother/my father/my grandfather' with common totem as the determining feature.

- A man or woman can live in *ngura kuriku* 'spouse's country'. In the case of a man living in his wife's country, she is the member of the locally senior patriline, but the husband has some totem in common with those of the local scene, maybe kangaroo or honey ant, but he has come from a different part of the track of that ancestral hero. In the spiritual sense he is not a total stranger.

3. *nguratja* 'man of actual senior ritual status relative to a particular totemic site (not merely the most senior of those present on a particular occasion)'; *ngura* 'totemic site', *-tja* 'pertaining to'; the *nguratja* pertains to the site.

Man is seen to pertain to specific land, belonging to it by some rightful, natural association. This is very different from the idea of ownership. Ownership can be exercised over any land, can be terminated, and depends on the conceived separation of owner and owned—one is over against the other. Instead, the *nguratja* concept introduces specificity: particular man, particular land, and particular totem, an indissoluble association and some kind of unifying notion. These characteristics are common also to the abstract unities identified during the epistemological analysis. Nevertheless, the *nguratja* term does not give any direct support for that concept, except in so far as they have features in common. What it does do is to draw attention to a critical difference between Aboriginal and white conceptualisation of the individual's relationship to land.

Cause, time and space

There are no words in Pitjantjatjara that cover the concepts of cause, time and space. Related vocabulary has to do with the social and descriptive, the specific and concrete, but not with quantifiable notions.

Cause

Among Westerners, physical properties of matter are used to explain natural events, but in the absence of such notions causality is differently conceptualised. There are several points to consider.

Relative to cause, Aborigines take the view that creation continues to function smoothly with human beings cooperating in the correct ritual. If the ceremonies are not performed, that is, if people stop cooperating (looking after the country), things grind to a halt because that is their nature. Accordingly Aputula men said that native cats had died out because the ceremonies were no longer performed for their increase.

Sudden untoward events, however, are held to be the result of adverse spiritistic activity. For instance, one day a heavy storm brought sudden rain and hail to Ernabella. Most people ran for cover, but two men picked up stones and hurled them into the teeth of the storm, shouting at it to go away. Possibly as a result of observing this type of action, Elkin stated that Aborigines act and react towards natural species and natural objects as they do towards persons (Elkin 1969:90). Nevertheless, in this example there is no need to suppose that Aborigines acted as if the storm was itself likely to respond to a few well-directed missiles. Instead, the explanation lies elsewhere. Elkin himself also noted that Aborigines recognise three types of causality: personal, magical and spiritistic (Elkin 1969:90). We have dismissed the idea that Aborigines conceptualise, or even imply, the use of magic, on the grounds that this is contrary to Aboriginal epistemology, but both of the other forms of cause are probably present in the example. Pitjantjatjara believe that both *mamu* and *kutatji* exert adverse influences. These are spiritistic entities and both are in the form of a man, but a *mamu* may appear also as a large dog-like animal and sometimes as a bird. Speaking about the hail storm afterwards, women attributed it to a *mamu* and credited the men with success in driving the creature away.

Other things that happen, such as the daily occurrences in camp, are explained in terms of facts. Blame and responsibility are apportioned according to what happens with little, if any, allowance being made for accident or chance—showing yet another area of thought that is anchored in the concrete.

In a real way, conceptualisation of cause is also linked with the notion of *tjukurpa*. As noted in chapter 2, the 'Dreaming' concept is described as the ground of all that is and all that happens (Elkin 1969:89-90, 93) and as a charter of events and a principle of order (Stanner 1979:24), both incorporating notions of cause. Douglas states that *tjukurpa* is 'the *cause* of the established order' (Douglas 1978-1979:329). In this text we have seen that the word denotes quality, thus anything to which the term is applied is 'eternal, true, just itself'. Things are as they are, happen as they happen because eternally it is of their nature so to be, so to happen.

In short, in understanding causality Aborigines draw on observable facts, or on ideas believed true, that are linked directly to reality.

Time

When compared with English vocabulary of time-related concepts, Pitjantjatjara is limited. We find, for instance:

kuwari	'now'
kuwaripangka	'before (in time)'
kuwaripa	'later'
kuwaripatjara	'before all things'
kuwaripatjara mulapa	'in the very beginning'
maḷangka	'afterwards'
mapalku	'at once, immediately'
mungawinki	'morning'
kaḷaḷa	'midday'
mungartji	'afternoon, yesterday'

While there is a word for 'day', *tjiṛiṛpi*, it refers to daytime, contrasting with *munga* 'night-time'.

For Pitjantjatjara, what is important is the seasonal cycle and whether or not a particular event has occurred, for instance initiation. The fact that something has happened is more important than when it occurred in terms of time. Nevertheless, another significant element is the relatedness of events, when they happen relative to each other—for instance, the simultaneity of certain seasonal occurrences such as the blustery west wind *piriya* (sometimes *piriyakutu*), heralding all the events of spring.

Time is only marginally divided into periods on the basis of length. There are no words in Pitjantjatjara that are equivalent to the English minute, hour, week and year. The words *tjiṛiṛpi* 'day' and *piṛa* 'moon, month' are used to convey length of time, but in the absence of numerals, they are not extensively used, that is, not for historical record.

In brief, almost all of the vocabulary related to time covers a short time span, a finding that agrees with Aboriginal concepts of time as noted by Elkin (Elkin 1969:91-4) and Stanner (Stanner 1979:34). Further, the ideas are better suited to daily social interaction than to history with its conceived chain reaction of cause and effect. For this reason, conceptualisation of time and the associated vocabulary work against taking a long term look at the future. They have to do with the now and a short period on either side of that. In other words, they favour concrete thought.

Space

There is no generic Pitjantjatjara word for space, nor are there words for length or area.

Distance is conceived in the adjectival but not in the nominal aspect. Words related to space are, for instance:

parari	'far'
ila	'near'
tjampu	'left'
waku	'right'
kakaraṛa	'east'
wiluṛara	'west'
alinytjara	'north'
ulpaṛira	'south'
maḷanga	'behind'
kuranyu	'ahead'
minuru	'up wind'
katu	'high, north'
tjaṛu	'low, south'
kantilypa	'side, edge, rib'
nguṛurpa	'middle'
ngura	'camp, country'

A place may be described as *puḷka* 'big', yet the term does not refer to area but instead to its importance for the speaker. Sites are significant in themselves, but important also is the relative position. This is for social reasons: for travelling, for finding water, game and bush foods. Relative position is important also for ritual, for specific tracks and sites are associated with specific mythological events. Such tracks may extend many hundreds of kilometres and be associated with a number of patrilocal clans, each of which is responsible for appropriate ceremony in its own area.

Space, therefore, is described rather than quantified. This assessment agrees with Elkin's general description (Elkin 1969:94-5) and again, like cause and time, focuses attention on the concrete and specific.

SUMMARY

Seeking to explain misunderstandings between Aborigine and white, we undertook an analysis to determine basic Aboriginal concepts and from that suggested two tools that might assist us. These tools and the analysis are supported by linguistic evidence.

Firstly, in the light of Piaget's work, both lexical and syntactic data suggest a preference among Pitjantjatjara for thought that retains a direct link with concrete reality. Several features of the language support this view. None of the concepts of learning, teaching and knowing include purely theoretical content; pure hypothesis and supposition have not been found and, in conformity with this, the content of answers to 'why' questions is always fact or believed fact. Absence of the more abstract forms of generalisation and a restriction in the use of alternatives has also been noted. In addition, the language shows an existential tone, due to the absence of an indefinite article 'a' and a general concrete

flavour, promoted by the absence of the infinitive form of the verb, the absence of a verb of 'doing', and the injection of an element of specificity into the concept of 'being'. Furthermore we have noted a fusion of the concepts of thinking, listening and heeding.

Absence of expressions such as 'either. . .or', together with the concrete features above, work against the use of combinatorial thought. Nevertheless logical thinking is shown in association with totemic belief and the kinship system. Even in these areas, first degree abstractions only are used, and while reasoning may proceed at an abstract level, it also remains no more than one step from what can be perceived through the senses. As it were, logic uses a network that remains horizontal to the concrete and linked directly to it at every point.

Secondly, the linguistic data illustrates Aboriginal interest in interaction, the second explanatory device. This is shown by terminology associated with the kinship system, by the treatment of number, by the type of comparison, and by the use made of alternatives. Other features that help to lend a general interactional or reciprocal tone are the *-tjara* concept and the adverbs *ngapartji* and *puṯu*.

Thirdly, in support of the basic concepts of the epistemology itself, we find no evidence to negate the theoretical analysis, and there is some positive support for it. For one thing, the degree of abstraction is confirmed. Next, adjectival concepts such as heavy and light are verbalised, but there is no linguistic evidence for nominal concepts such as weight. Again, the epistemological categories of cause, time and space all lean towards the descriptive, the social or concrete but away from the formal; and the concept of power supports aspects of causality present in the analysis. In addition, Aborigines and whites have different ideas about the relationship of human beings to land and to matter in general. This is shown by Pitjantjatjara conceptualisation of giving/receiving and by the *-tjara* and *nguratja* concepts.

NOTES

1. Another word is often translated 'forget', but again the English introduces a transitive element absent from the Pitjantjatjara: *watarku* 'oblivious'; *watarkurinyi* should be 'become oblivious' (intransitive).
2. Although he does not attribute them to concrete thinking, Basil Sansom's (1980) account of events in *The Camp at Wallaby Cross*, especially chaps 5 and 6, appears to illustrate concrete thought with associated authority and politics.
3. The suffix *-mpa* functions in other ways, but these are difficult to define and not relevant here.
4. The following abbreviations are used: def—definite; f—female; hyp—hypothetical; m—male noun class; neg—negative; pres—present.
5. To give the meaning 'because', the word *panya* is often inserted before these participles:

   Watingku maḷu nyangu panya pilunpa paṭaṛa.
   'The man kangaroo saw because he waited quietly.'

Panya has other uses; for instance, it is comparable with a relative pronoun such as 'who', 'what', 'that' and 'as' noted above; it can function as a kind of definite article. The topic is complex and not immediately relevant here. We note only that *panya* has meaning beyond that of 'because'.

6. I must amend a statement (Bain 1971:8) in which I said that Aborigines do not generalise. This is incorrect since the point at issue is the content of the generalisation, not the practice as such.
7. Other dialects related to Pitjantjatjara do not show this feature, for instance Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi. These mark the recipient with the dative case (Paul Eckert, personal communication).
8. In Pitjantjatjara it is possible also to wrongly identify the noun. This occurs because it is not always necessary to state the third person, nominative singular pronoun (he/she/it), and in this type of context, an adjective can be mistaken for a noun:

Wati	*witulyangku*	*wakaṇi* . . . (*-ngku*, nominative transitive suffix)
man	strong	spears

'The strong man spears. . .'

witulyangku	*wakaṇi* . . .
strong (he)	spears

7

Further Empirical Support for Proposed Explanatory Tools: Questions and Answers

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of the Pitjantjatjara language has suggested that certain modes of thought common to whites are not represented in Aboriginal thinking. This finding provides empirical support for our theoretical one, derived from an analysis of Aboriginal ritual (chap. 3). There we noted a cross-cultural difference in the degree of abstraction used and suggested that it could explain many problems in cross-cultural communication. Nevertheless it might be said that the linguistic data presented was sampled selectively. It is desirable, therefore, to provide additional supportive evidence. This is available through an independently constructed series of questions and answers to which, by chance, I had access. The questions were designed by a social worker for a survey he conducted in 1968 and, usually in his presence, were administered to the Aputula people by myself.[1]

In this analysis we shall be less concerned with the overt content of the questions and of the answers they elicited than with the light they shed on the degree of abstraction used. Our attention is directed, therefore, to the degree of abstraction shown by Aboriginal responses relative to the degree of abstraction shown by the questions. This procedure will draw attention to any disparity between questions and answers, providing the additional supportive evidence we need. As a further benefit it will show the effect of such differences on successful communication. This analysis will amply support the findings of the previous chapters, again endorsing the proposed explanatory tool.

Aborigines were asked if they were willing to respond to the questions and told that replies would not be made public. Some years later, realising how valuable the material was, I sought permission from respondents to use it in the present text. Those concerned granted the request, giving in explanation their view that I help Aborigines. Nevertheless it is possible for research findings to be used to gain political or other advantage. For this reason I have hesitated to use this material here but decided to go ahead hoping that publication will assist in promoting understanding between Aborigines and whites. Seagrim has spelled out ethical problems faced by investigators in related work (Seagrim 1977:366-375), problems that are the more acute because of the trust expressed. Some of the problems are relevant here.

The Aboriginal people who responded were all long-term residents of Aputula, that is, people for whom the place was a centre, although they might not live there all the time. All were in the town when I first visited it in 1961 and had been for years before that. Between them they represented all the core families. Other individuals came later and stayed, others again visited, maybe for months on end, and always there was a relationship

with one or other of the families already present. At the time of administering the questionnaire, only nineteen adult Aborigines were in town, fifteen of whom responded, seven men and eight women. In addition the Thursday Island husband of one of the women answered the questions. He had lived in the camp for about two years and while his replies had much in common with those of the Aborigines, they differed in two important respects as will be shown.

Questioning extended over some days with few difficulties. Questions were posed in Pitjantjatjara and some English, and replies also were in both languages. Emphasis was on understanding rather than on specific formula. No premium was placed on speed. Some respondents went through the set in three quarters of an hour, but older people in particular took longer, requiring more than one session. Questions were administered wherever people happened to be: in the camp; under the tank near the railway line; in the middle of a deserted road; leaning against a fence. Usually respondents came aside to give their replies. This practice was not always possible, but the presence of another person did not appear to influence a respondent's replies, a finding that Seagrim and Lendon (1980:68) also record.

The questions and the topics

Originally, the questions were arranged according to topics such as education, work, wages, health and housing. Since our concern is not with this type of content, but rather with contrasting degrees of abstraction and with the various ways in which that contrast is shown, questions and their attendant answers have been selected with these things in mind and grouped under topics appropriate to our purpose: concrete answers to general questions; the concept of learning; problems with hypothesis; cause and inference; the future; and Aborigines' and Thursday Islander's responses compared.

Some questions gave respondents no opportunity to use second degree abstraction, others opened up that possibility, and all of these last are presented in what follows.

Questions and custom: cross-cultural problems

We assume that the approach brought to the questions by respondents originates in Aboriginal culture and, for the Thursday Islander, elsewhere. As already noted, only he and two of these Aborigines had received formal education from whites. In the context of questioning, two features of Aboriginal custom are important. One has been mentioned already (see pp. 85-6): that Aborigines wait for an invitation to join in activity. This reticence is particularly important in ritual contexts; but in secular activity also, courtesy, or lack of authority, requires that either you do not take an initiative or, depending on circumstance, that you are very careful how you do so. The criterion is that you do not make yourself a boss, thereby assuming seniority and downgrading another person and his ability.

The next custom, said by Aborigines to be a 'big law', is that you do not give information about something that is not your business. If you are not a person of authority

in respect of that particular thing, even although you may know of it, may have seen it, or joined in discussion about it, then you do not answer questions about it. This custom is of particular importance in sacred affairs. For instance, if authorities require information about sacred sites because a road is to be built, then it is necessary to consult the right people. Those of knowledge, but of no authority, will deny the presence of sacred sites that in fact are endangered. This problem arose in northern South Australia when re-siting the Stuart Highway. The same type of thing occurs at the secular level. When giving information about a possible court case, witnesses do not say or are very reluctant to say of a third party, 'He saw that too'. This is noticeable in the absence of that person. On one occasion a man claimed ignorance of whether another had seen a particular event but moments later the individual in question arrived. Immediately, without seeming embarrassment and without encouragement, the first man engaged the newcomer in discussion and it was at once clear that they had witnessed the event together. Even in his presence, a man may resent it if someone introduces something that he regards as his affair and will state this in no uncertain terms: 'You speak for yourself. I will speak for myself'.

There is a partial exception to this practice. When asked a question, an individual may well refer to the experience of close kin. At the same time, during general conversation, the 'big law' does not apply and Aborigines will speak of other people's affairs, as they do when casual queries are raised by friends. During one survey on the topic of drinking Aputula people spoke freely, but on that occasion information was gained by informal group discussion, not by a set of questions answered for the most part in isolation. The point to note is that in a rather more formal context, one that whites could probably treat as impersonal, Aborigines restrict what they say to the personal. These customs, that is, to wait for an invitation and to mind one's own business, can limit responses to questions and are in keeping with a concrete response to enquiry.

Method of reporting

Our stated objective is to identify the degrees of abstraction in use. The investigation shows concrete thought throughout Aboriginal replies. Nevertheless, within this general pattern the content of these replies varies considerably, and in order to show this, all responses to a question are placed in the text. In addition, background detail is given to bring out the characteristics of mode, for instance, information to show that a reply echoes the history of the person who gave it. When such information is placed adjacent to a reply, it is given in italics. Most examples are introduced briefly to direct the reader's attention to the significant feature of the replies.

The characteristic mode of question and response is well shown in an example taken not from Aputula but from Oombulgurri in the Kimberley, Western Australia where for a few months I worked as a community advisor. In 1983 council elections were a few weeks away and one morning, in the course of conversation, I mentioned this to an Aboriginal woman. I noted also that the only woman councillor had just resigned and then asked, 'Are you going to elect another woman?' 'Might be more than one?'. My companion replied, 'I work in the garden. I have a job. Don't want to be on the council'. Here I was using a

generalisation, breaking the direct link with the real, but the Aboriginal woman grounded both question and response in the specific or concrete. This same type of contrast, although shown in a number of different ways, we can expect to note again and again in the responses that follow.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Concrete answers to general questions (examples 1-3)

Example 1

This question invited either a formal or a concrete response. Replies were all personal and some showed also a concrete approach to comparison.

Aboriginal people/you receive money when they/you work. Is this a little/all right/plenty?

3— little/small
mother, wife, sister of stockmen

1— little
unemployed stockman from poorly paying station

1— little money sometimes on stations, plenty on railways
sons worked on various stations and son-in-law on railway

1— some little: some big
husband and sons worked on various stations

1— from some stations big money: from some stations small money: from railway small
sons worked on various stations and husband on railway

1— good on railways: stockmen don't get much—too small
husband worked on railway; brothers on stations

1— self get too little: on stations get good money
ex-stockman now working at store

1— all right (for himself); on X station get good money: store too small
school gardener, ex-stockman and ex-store worker

1— too little (for himself); good money on X station (same X as above)
police tracker; sons worked on various stations

2— all right/plenty
husband and wife—their last job was with a contractor; he had also worked for the railways

2— did not receive the question (due to circumstances beyond the author's control)

Most respondents knew with fair accuracy who paid well and who did not. Only two expressed disappointment with wages: the police tracker and the woman who said that railway pay was small. Both the tracker and the woman's husband (a white working for the railways) received award rates, but at the time this payment was not compulsory on cattle stations, although X station, named by some respondents, was already paying well.

Replies were factual and personalised and thus restricted to pay received for the respondent's current work, to what was received in the past, or to that received by close kin. For instance, people who were not employed, such as wives, mothers and sisters, answered for their husbands, sons or brothers, and a father-in-law for his son-in-law. Again, only those who worked or had worked in the store mentioned it, and only the tracker mentioned police wages.

In another concrete feature, employers were noted individually and two-way comparisons made, but comparatives were not used. There was no generalised ranking across the range of work and no one used a generalised statement, such as 'different boss; different pay' or 'some pay (is) bigger'. Comparisons instead were direct, such as 'some little; some big'.

Throughout, responses show concrete thought. While in principle such thinking could make use of the generality of an individual's experience, of all the person has seen and heard and done, these Aputula answers do not do so. Instead, responses are personalised so that an individual's replies are based on his/her own experience or that of close kin. They do not include other people's experience, nor what the respondent has seen or heard if it occurred outside his own immediate family. This could result from the custom of minding one's own business, from the form of the question, or from lack of facility in English. None of these possibilities disturbs the fact that, for whatever reason, Aborigines did personalise responses, did not generalise across the community, and used a concrete approach to comparison.

Example 2

Respondents were asked to comment on the good and bad features of houses, those of whites and those of Aboriginal people. Replies of most interest to us are those about Aboriginal housing, and there is no need for more than a brief comment about the others.

Most respondents, both men and women, spoke favourably of white people's places but three made adverse comments. These comments were not about houses as such but, instead, about housework ('work and work and work in white people's house and then go to camp') or social problems experienced in contact with whites ('bad if take grog to house and people drink'; 'push out Aborigine people').

On the question of Aboriginal housing, objectivity and generalisation was possible, but concrete thought was used. Difference of opinion was coincident with sex.

What is good about Aboriginal people's houses?

What is bad about Aboriginal people's houses?

(a respondent's answers to the two questions are set down side by side)

WOMEN

First Question	Second Question
when I was young, I lived in a shed at X; don't like to live outside—built wurlie	good; will get better
look after children	can't keep clean as well (as whites)
keep out of rain	dirt floor
warm in rain	(no comment)
when rains keep dry	(no comment)
good	(no comment)
(no comment)	can't look after kid; get sick, go to hospital; water come in—rain (had lived in a house in Port Augusta)
(no comment)	(no comment)

MEN

First Question	Second Question
all right if look after them	not built house properly
nothing	no nail, no iron, no nothing; cart water
nothing good	help people get sick
(no comment)	Aborigine people can't get anything; no money; don't know how to build
big house better	(no comment)
(no comment)	(no comment)
(poor communication with respondent—he described white people's houses)	(poor communication—respondent continued description, perhaps anticipating query about preferred housing)

Four points form the basis of a contrast between men's and women's replies:

- While women's opinions varied, six out of eight spoke well of Aboriginal wurlies but only one out of seven men noted favourable features.

- On the other hand, two men made strongly adverse statements, maintaining that there was nothing good about Aborigines' houses. No woman said that.
- Women's ideas were housewifely or motherly in orientation and referred to shelter, caring for children, and keeping clean.
- By contrast, while one man referred to health, men tended to emphasise the process of construction or that of maintenance. No woman referred to these topics, although as we have seen a woman sometimes helped a man to build.

Women's attention was on domestic and family concerns, taking up areas of their traditional role and responsibility. They were more likely than men to make appreciative comment about the wurlies, and while recognising good features of white people's houses, they were less likely than men to express dissatisfaction with their own. Only one woman had nothing good to say and made a strongly adverse comment, but having lived in a house, she had a personal and individual reason for her view. Men's comments also were in keeping with their responsibilities. Thus, as builders, they were critical of Aboriginal housing while approving white people's houses and, unlike women, were critical also of Aboriginal achievement relative to whites.

In general, replies were personalised, reflecting the division of labour; thus caring contrasted with constructing. This limitation may be mere custom, but if so, then minding one's own business was at least coincident with a restriction in generalisation.

Example 3

The importance of concrete limitations was well shown in responses to queries about health. Whites hold that there are important connections between hygiene and health, food and health. Questions were framed to assess the Aboriginal view and, theoretically, objectivity and generalisation were possible. But as before, a general question was taken personally.

Do Aboriginal children get sick more often than white children?

(If the answer is 'Yes') Why do you think this is so?

(Responses are grouped for reference in discussion.)

	First Question	Second Question
a) male, non-drinkers	same	(not applicable)
male, non-drinkers	same	(not applicable)
b) grandmother, drinker	yes	not sure why
grandfather, "	yes	(no comment)
grandmother, "	yes	(no comment)
grandfather, "	yes	(no comment)
c) grandfather, drinker	yes	mothers don't look after them when go hunting

his son, drinker	yes	aren't looked after properly; cart water long way to wash
his son-in-law, drinker	yes	houses no good; live in humpies
d) wife of (c) grandfather, non-drinker	no, same	(not applicable)
their daughter, drinker	same	(not applicable)
another daughter, drinker	same as white children	(not applicable)
e) classificatory daughter of (c) grandfather, non-drinker	more often	not good mothers
f) female, drinker	might get sick	Aborigine children get sick suddenly from being dirty
female, drinker	yes	can't keep clean in camp; no table; dogs lick plates

Examination shows that three factors influenced responses to the first question:

- The fact that respondents replied for children of their own extended family camp only;
- Whether or not the family camp was drinking or non-drinking;
- Whether or not the respondent had direct responsibility in caring for the children.

The effect of these factors is shown in the following summary:

a) The non-drinking men of non-drinking camps denied greater sickness among Aboriginal children.

b) Two pairs of grandparents, drinkers, acknowledged greater sickness among Aboriginal children but made no comment about why.

c) A grandfather, his son and son-in-law, all drinkers from an extended drinking camp, all with families, said that Aboriginal children are sick more often.

d) Grandmother and her two daughters were the wives and/or sisters of the men of above. They all, therefore, came from the same extended family drinking camp. Nevertheless grandmother was a non-drinker and she played a major role in caring for her daughters' children. These women said there was no difference between Aboriginal and white children's health. These responses contrasted with those of their husbands. It could be that the women were on the defensive as care givers. It must be noted that they were often up against many drink-associated difficulties. Nevertheless their male kin kept to concrete observation of their children.

e) This young woman was the classificatory sister to the young women above. She had grown up with them and although a non-drinker, still lived in the same drinking camp. She had a child of her own and this toddler kept reasonable health. The woman, however, disagreed with her sisters' views and said that Aboriginal children get sick more often than white, and she blamed it on inadequate child care. She appears to be answering, therefore, not for her own child but for the other children in the camp.

f) The last two women, both drinkers from two different drinking camps, said that Aboriginal children get sick more often than white children. One was the woman with experience in Port Augusta and the other was married to a white. Their circumstances were different from those of everybody else.

In response to questioning, people replied for themselves, from their own concrete situation or involvement.

Answers to the second part of the question show that two men (c) noted living conditions as contributory, with one probably implying the usefulness of washing, and three, two men and a woman (c and e), noted child care. Two women only (f) associated cleanliness and health explicitly. Since one of these had lived in a house in a town and the other was married to a white, it is possible that they had more training than anyone else on the subject and so blamed circumstances beyond Aboriginal control. No respondent referred to the importance of food or sleep.

Looking at the answers to both parts of the question, one might conclude that concepts of hygiene, preventative medicine and nutrition were little known. Nevertheless to do so too easily is to miss entirely underlying but important data. It is needful also to consider who said what, for that is significant.

As the above analysis has shown, many factors were involved in responses. Nevertheless, from observation, the children of group (a), a non-drinking camp, were as healthy as white children, but those of the drinking camps were less fortunate. Answers reflected this situation since they were specific to the extended family camp and not generalised across the community. Consequently if a questioner wanted to find out what Aborigines knew about children's health, the responses would be misleading. Without knowing something of the circumstances, one might assess the people of the non-drinking camps, who cared well for their youngsters and who helped also to feed hungry children from other camps, as careless or unobservant or ignorant, and others as better informed.

As all of this shows, a concrete response to a general question can render the collection of relevant data difficult. A superficial analysis without considerable background knowledge of conditions could easily lead to incorrect conclusions.

As an addendum, direct connection between health, hygiene and food was suggested by the next three questions:

Do you think that being clean can help stop sickness?

Do you think using a proper toilet can help stop sickness?

Do you think that eating proper food can help stop sickness?

Everyone answered 'Yes' to each of these queries, showing that when the 'wanted' answer was obvious, then Aputula Aborigines gave it.

All in all, responses to questionnaire examples 1-3 show evidence of concrete thought in which personalisation and specificity in responses contrast with questions that are more objective and general in intention. Some responses (example 1) show also a concrete treatment of comparison.

Concept of learning (examples 4-6)

The following examples all required use by respondents of the concept of learning. Assessment reveals a concrete notion: becoming knowledgeable by doing or otherwise experiencing.

Example 4

At the time of questioning, all Aboriginal children at Aputula attended school. While not all respondents could say what was learned, there was unanimity amongst those who could. Both what was included and what was excluded is illuminating.

Children go to school. Is this good? Why?

All respondents answered 'Yes' to the first query and so responded positively to the second query, 'Why?':

1—good dinner

14—learn
- 4—nothing specified
- 1—learn more than me (not specific about what was learned)
- 1—get same as white people
- 1—like kids to learn more than me; can help me later on—write
- 2—learn English
- 1—learn to talk
- 2—learn to read
- 2—read and write

While one elderly man valued children's schooling for the midday meal provided, the rest valued it for what was learned. While some (five) could not specify what that might be, most (eight) noted communication skills. No one mentioned arithmetic or practical subjects such as gardening or sewing—all taught at the school. It is fair to assume that certain subjects, such as number, were not understood or not valued but that others such as gardening might well be valued but were thought to be better learned out of school, on the job, in contrast to skills of communication.

As a point of fact, most parents had not attended school, as we have seen, and while they spoke some English, their children spoke more. Since Pitjantjatjara or the closely related dialect of Luritja was the usual language of home, children heard and used more

English in school than elsewhere. There they spoke it, read and wrote it, and gained some proficiency. These activities were either reduced or largely unavailable outside school hours. On the other hand, practical skills learned by adults while out working, perhaps when they themselves were children, far exceeded those of the present youngsters. This observation supports the view that in the opinion of respondents, communication skills were best taught in school, but technical knowledge was gained with practice and experience, actually at work. These things were a matter of observation, and questions of formal education did not arise. While such views might be echoed of many primary schools, that does not alter the fact that the experiential concept of learning, becoming knowledgeable by doing, accounts for all these answers.

Example 5

Two questions were raised in an attempt to find out what respondents had themselves learned from whites and what they appreciated or deplored. Again specificity of reply and the nature of things learned pointed to a concrete notion of learning.

(a) **What good things have the Aboriginal people learnt from the white people?**

5—food:
- food—fruit, chocolate, lollies
- learn about good tucker: flour, tea, sugar, bread; keep house
- food
- good tucker; be more like white man
  store worker
- good tucker—bullock, sheep; English
  school gardener

1—better medicine
currently in receipt of 'pain tablets'

1—to go to hospital
recent personal experience

1—to be clean

1—to stay in one place
ritual leader who, while at Aputula, enjoyed permanent seniority, as he would not do in other country where someone else was the ritual boss

1—work
had been in domestic employment

1—driving vehicles; speak English
had mechanical training

1—school kids have more than mother and father
police tracker

1—no; about babies

2—no/no answer

The list of 'good things' included two types of items only: things that could be eaten (food and medicine) and things that could be done, such as driving vehicles or keeping clean. In each instance there was an element of learning by experiencing—by the eating, maybe by the cooking, or other exercise of practical skills. There were two possible exceptions: one woman said initially 'No', but then added 'about babies'. This respondent was an experienced midwife and the mother of four sons; she knew a lot about babies but at the time her youngest was bottle fed. Her response probably referred to this practice, which she had learned from whites, and if so, then she also noted something practical and not information about babies. In the other possibility, a woman said, 'learn about food', which she then listed: flour, tea, sugar, bread. These items make it unlikely that she referred to information about nutrition, so that her responses also conform with a notion of learning by eating or perhaps to the practical skill of cooking food. A concrete concept of learning is again adequate to account for all the ideas advanced here.

Lastly, there was one puzzling reply that introduced the idea of 'having' (school kids have more than mother and father). This is discussed with a similar case under example 6.

(b) **What bad things have the Aboriginal people learnt from the white people?**

9—don't know (or no comment)

3—learning to drink/to drink/drinking

2—fighting

1—white people belt dark people for no reason

Here again, learning by experiencing, being involved, taking part was again evident. By contrast with the list of 'good things' the list of 'bad' ones was short but illuminating. While the small number of replies could be the result of courtesy or prudence, such considerations did not always restrain respondents. Six only replied, five of whom (4 men, 1 woman, both drinkers and non-drinkers) noted drinking or fighting. Since fighting was well known to Aborigines before whites arrived, it is probable that the references were to drunken fighting, something from which no one was exempt even if sober, and the cause of many injuries at Aputula. If this rendering is allowed, then all five referred to drinking as something adverse learned from whites. In any case, whether fighting or drinking, the same rendering, becoming knowledgeable by experiencing or doing, applies to both. That notion was of particular interest in the only other unfavourable lesson listed, namely, 'white people belt dark people for no reason'. The respondent's wife suffered such aggression a couple of days before her husband answered the questions. Enquiry revealed that it came about like this. The woman was sitting on the ground near the railway water tank with other Aboriginal women when an inebriated white came out of the hotel, walked across to where they were sitting and kicked her. The attack occurred seemingly without preliminary provocation, but just because she was there. This kind of thing happened from time to time, and if a man was present it was he who was attacked. On this occasion the

women were alone. As noted, relationship between Aborigines and whites was usually good at Aputula, but drunkenness could disturb this. This respondent's reply agreed, therefore, with all the others in using an experiential concept of 'learn'.

Example 6

Responses showed three concrete elements:

- First, Aborigines limit the content of the concept of learning to things that can be learned by experience;
- Second, respondents do not generalise across the community but limit replies to their own personal experience;
- Third, although the question was about the future, replies were linked to past or present experiences.

Are there some things you would like to learn that the white people know about? Why?

(a respondent's answers to the two questions are set down side by side)

10—no/nothing/don't know/(no comment)	
1—yes, to read like the children	read about tucker: anything—tea, flour, sugar *storeworker*
1—building, engineering	good to know for job *police tracker*
1—to cook; to have wood and water	(no comment)
1—to live more like white people	(no comment)
1—about houses, stones	want to live the same way

Not many answered this question, one in three, and those who did all referred to practical skills using their own past and present as a basis for their reply. The store worker wanted to be able to read 'like the children', something learned by practice at school, and his objective was to read about store items. The police tracker also extended his present working situation and seemed to refer to practical needs. Under supervision, he already undertook minor maintenance work in the police yard and on the police vehicle, and he wanted to learn 'building' and 'engineering', both things that would be 'good to know for (the) job'. A different practical skill, cooking, was noted by a woman respondent, the mother of three children who had worked in domestic employment.

The ritual leader was another who replied. He wanted to learn 'to live more like white people'. This was a rather vague response; nevertheless, it had roots in the past. The respondent had already started the practical process by learning 'to stay in one place' (his response to example 5a), by eating white people's food and by drinking at the hotel.

The response of another elderly man was also a little uncertain. He wanted to learn 'about houses' and about 'stones'. This response could include the theoretical, but must be interpreted with caution since he valued children's schooling for the midday meal (example 4). Under the circumstances it is probable that he referred to practical things, for instance, to practical ability in identifying minerals for sale. He and others were already making a little money from selling stone, mostly for polishing. In addition, he probably wanted to improve building skills and materials so that he could upgrade his housing and '. . .live the same way' as white people, his stated aim. While this interpretation is not certain, his response to example 2 lends it a measure of support. There, referring to the bad features of Aboriginal housing, he said, 'no nail, no iron, no nothing; cart water'.

In a word, only five answered this question, and their replies again gave evidence of concrete thinking. This was shown in several ways: by the experiential content accorded to learning, as evidenced by the type of thing to be learned such as cooking and engineering; by the personalisation of responses; and by the approach to the future. This notion was linked in each case to the individual respondent's past or present. In addition, Aborigines appear to have tackled the question and answer in the same way as they would tackle practical behaviour. In everyday events, as we have seen, they wait for invitation to join in new activity instead of putting themselves forward. Similarly, in response to the question they did not propose participation in some new activity, having no specific invitation to do so. As a result, the content of question and answer were accorded an element of concrete reality, that is, they were treated as if somehow reflecting the real.

There is one item not yet assessed, the second on the woman's list, namely 'to have wood and water'. This 'having' in the context of learning was raised also in the previous example (5a). In responding to that question and listing good things learned from whites, the tracker said, 'School kids have more than mother and father'. This man had worked with whites from the time he was young; he spoke fluent English and was literate in English. The woman had worked extensively on cattle stations and both had lived in Aputula for some years. Neither could have been unaware of the hard work necessary in order to 'have'. It seems that they referred to experience; children enjoy more than their parents and the woman wanted to enjoy the supplies of wood and water. Such things were to be learned from whites, and again the reference was to becoming knowledgeable by experiencing.

In summary, in examples 4 to 6 we have focused attention on the concept of learning and found respondents using a concrete notion: that learning occurs by experiencing and by doing. In addition the examples show concrete thought in three further ways: by responses that are personalised, specific to the individual, or to the respondent's close family; by the concrete approach to the future; and associated with this, by the absence of any proposal for some totally new occupation. This absence is in keeping with the Aboriginal custom, noted above, that one should wait for invitation before joining in new activity; and that not to do so is to assume an authority that one does not have. Be this as it may, responses are tied to the past and the present and so to the real. In effect what is intended as a formal question is treated as if it had some actuality or more than merely formal significance. In these several ways, questions and answers show the use of different

degrees of abstraction: the more abstract contrasts with the less, and communication can be impaired.

Problems with hypothesis (examples 7-9)

Questions 7 and 8 were purely formal, bearing little if any relation to reality, and in each case it was difficult to get a response. In replying to these questions respondents had to transcend the real, but they resisted the hypothetical and showed considerable uncertainty about what was being asked. The difficulty was overcome as a rule, but not always, by further questioning and by giving encouragement through the use of greater specificity.

Example 7

Aborigines were asked to envisage a kind of 'dream house'. Living conditions at Aputula have been described in chapter 5, and the questioning predated government interest in Aboriginal housing. The question, therefore, encouraged thinking about something outside respondents' actual situations and outside the experience of most of them. Instead it focused attention on a hypothetical notion, 'my house'. Our interest rests on the difficulty in getting replies, rather than on their content, and on the general attitude to the question.

What sort of a house would you like to live in?

(brief description of replies)

14—specified number of rooms

8—toilets

8—stove or kitchen

7—water

7—laundry

5—bathing facilities

3—light

15—roofs, tin or iron

15—floors, cement or wood

15—walls: tin, iron, wood, fibro, brick

Respondents gave little detail but, once started with a bit of prompting and by directing attention to houses round about, they showed considerable interest and some of them seemed to show even excitement. Often they gave information by pointing. The following week it was found that husbands and wives had checked with each other to see if their details tallied, and five years later, shortly after they at last moved into houses, one woman was trying to recall the name of the man who phrased the questions. She explained, and all

the others who were present agreed, that he started the housing project. This observation provides direct evidence that Aborigines did accord concrete content to questions and answers, a notion advanced as a possibility in the previous section (example 6).

Replies about the houses were necessarily specific, but that is less significant here than the initial difficulty in getting replies at all and the misunderstanding by Aborigines of the nature of the questions. This misunderstanding is shown by the eagerness displayed once initial reserve was overcome, by the checks made between husbands and wives, and by the belief, voiced years later, that this was the beginning of the housing scheme. In other words, the question was interpreted as having some substance in fact or at least as indicating intent by some unspecified authority.

Example 8

Something of the same problem existed within this next example. Three contrasts were shown in replies: one was based on experience, another reflected the respondent's sex, and the last reflected a man's ritual standing at Aputula.

If you had a great deal of money, what would you do with it?

(Elaborate) If you had enough money to buy many things, such as Mr. . . (naming local station owner) and rich white men, what would you buy with it?

(If no suitable response) Would you buy a house or a car?[2]

Men	Women
6—car or truck: buy car, truck buy car (2) any motor car motor car truck	1—motor car
1—can't drive	
6—house: cart timber buy house buy myself house buy iron, cement, build house make store beside house to sell things house	2—house: house better than car bathroom, toilet, buy house
3—food: buy tucker get tucker tucker	7—food: food (2) food: tea, sugar, milk food: tea, sugar, meat food: buy meat, fruit, custard porridge

	flour, sugar, tea, little tinned meat spend on tucker for kids
1—give some, if asked by someone who needs it	1—keep to look after children 3—clothing: shoes, socks dress clothes: dress, socks 2—toiletries: soap soap, Rinso, talc powder 1—bed, mattress
3—bank or keep: keep (2) bank	2—bank: bank put in bank

Differing experience is the basis for the first contrast in responses. Respondents showed resistance to something purely hypothetical, a resistance aggravated if that something was totally outside the individual's own experience. Replies of all seven men and of three of the women contrasted with those of the remaining five women. We will look first at this group of ten. As we have seen already (see chap. 5), men had experience of handling large sums of cash, although none owned a car, and further, building houses was men's work. While none of the three women had handled a large amount of money, each had some personal experience of cars or of living in houses. In these replies, perhaps because of their familiarity with money, men responded positively to the notion of plenty, although in all but three cases it was necessary to introduce some specificity into questioning. Six out of seven noted cars, and the odd man out was a pensioner whose eyesight was failing. When prompted he said, 'Can't drive'. One woman only responded positively to the idea of a vehicle. She was married to the Thursday Islander who already owned a car. All men but one showed interest in houses or housing, but the odd man out was hesitant about this particular question while displaying what seemed to be excited interest in related topics. In example 2 (last respondent), instead of commenting about Aboriginal housing, he described white people's houses with what appeared to be considerable excitement, and he showed similar interest in example 7. Nevertheless he showed little interest in housing in response to the present question. The three women had lived in houses and two of them took up the question, but the third, the wife of the Thursday Islander and whose house had burned down, did not.[3] Responses of these ten contrasted with those of the other five women, none of whom had handled much money, none of whom had lived in a house, although all had worked in them, and none of whose families owned a car. Even with encouragement, these respondents listed neither house nor vehicle.

In all of these replies, respondents underlined their own circumstances. This was shown by their resistance to hypothesis and imagining embodied in this question and, if that resistance was partly overcome, by responses that in one way or another were related to experience. Those who lacked the experience did not respond at all to the hypothetical notion of 'a lot of money'.

The second division is shown by a general contrast between men's and women's replies. If the men's interest was mainly in houses and cars, the women's chief concern was food. All but one, the wife of a white, listed this item, but only three men did so. Perhaps women more often than men were hungry, and further, they had the problem of feeding not only themselves but the children. In general, women's interests centred in motherly things—food and clothing and care of children—thereby echoing earlier responses. In accord with this, their area of responsibility was emphasised. So also was that of the men through their responses to ideas about houses and cars.

The third contrast occurred within men's replies: men of senior ritual status and patriline at Aputula preferred houses to cars, but for those of lesser ritual standing in the Aputula country the preference was reversed. Possibly the former, having ritual seniority in the area, did not have such urgent need of mobility (cf. ritual leader's notion that a good thing learned from whites was to stay in the one place—example 5a). Furthermore since they had the major ritual role in caring for the country, they had a responsibility to be there. By contrast, mobility had greater attractions for men living outside their own country, often with wife's people. Their interest appeared to be in travelling to and fro, not merely in getting back to their own area. That, in any case, was already possible. It seemed, therefore, that Aputula held sufficiently strong attraction for these men to want to live there. This belief was born out eventually when some of them bought cars, visited their home country and patriline from time to time, but returned to Aputula.

The specificity or personalisation of responses is well shown by these three contrasts within the one set of replies, each of which brings out an area of individual experience or responsibility. The major point is the rejection of a proposition that was put up simply as a talking point. At the same time, under pressure, some positive response was shown if a link existed with a respondent's own experience. Such a link is not found in formal thought which breaks the direct connection with the real. We conclude, therefore, that these responses reflect a concrete mode of thinking. This feature of the answers contrasts with the formality of the question, revealing a difference in the thinking of questioner and questioned.

Example 9

In other contexts also, Aborigines kept away from the purely hypothetical. They themselves refrained from advancing mere proposition and did not give their imaginations free rein, but instead linked responses to the personal and real.

(a) **The station owners say that because Aborigines sometimes walk off a job before it is finished that there will be fewer jobs for Aboriginal stockmen. What could be done about this?**[4]

Women	Men
1—go to mission	1—work on railway *store worker*

1—might be other work; don't know what	1—shearing sheep; contract work; fencing
1—perhaps Aborigine people don't understand about work	1—go after dingoes and stones instead
	1—make hobbles, stock whips; sell
	1—look for stones, kangaroo, go to mission, settlement
	1—join army *classificatory brother had been in the army*
4—(no comment)	
1—don't know	1—don't know

Matters relating to the basic premise have been noted already (chap. 5, 'Aboriginal-white encounters: economic activities') and there is no need to comment again. Looking at the responses above, it is immediately obvious that no one suggested staying on the job. There are two possible explanations, both probably contributory: the reasons for leaving were endorsed as valid by the community, and since in practice men did walk off the job, no one conceived the hypothetical proposition that they might not do so. Everyone kept to concrete reality and, accepting that as the base line, looked at the future in terms of what was happening already.

Other evidence of concrete thought was shown by these responses. Most men offered alternative ideas (all from their own personal experience or that of close kin), and the store employee, who helped to unload store goods from the railway trucks, again extended present experience (cf. his response to example 7). He said, 'Work on railway'. None of the women put forward any ideas at all. Although in response to other questions they replied in terms of the experience of the immediate family (for instance, about men's wages, example 1), they avoided this question and so did not suggest what men might undertake. This was the only topic in the whole set of questions on which all women were silent.

As this example shows, responses remained anchored in the actual. No one advanced something purely propositional (that men might stay at work), no one floated an idea, but instead, suggestions for the future were tied to the individual's present. It is possible that, as before, custom was important: women kept out of men's affairs and men refrained from pushing into a new work area without invitation. If that is the perspective from which replies were given, then again it appears to arise from a concrete view of the question and answer.

It is interesting to note that Aputula Aborigines lived by the railway line, knew that the pay was good and yet, except for one man who was already partly involved, did not advance the idea of railway work. Immediately following these responses, the idea was put directly with the next question.

(b) Would it be good for Aboriginal men to work on the railway? Why?

(a respondent's answers to the two questions are set down side by side)

WOMEN

First Question	Second Question
1—yes	can work any time
1—yes	food: tea, meat; can get them
1—yes	good pay
1—yes	good money
1—perhaps good	(no comment)
1—not for some: good for other	(no comment)
1—yes, perhaps	big work; get frightened of fettlers
1—no	cattle station work better

MEN

First Question	Second Question
1—yes	make good money but usually spend on drink; get drunk and don't turn up for job and lose job
1—all right	good work; good wages
1—yes	wages better than on stations
1—good	good money
1—work on railway	make more money
1—yes: some that like that	good money
1—yes	(no comment—no reason given)

Fourteen out of fifteen respondents (although three women qualified their answers) were now in favour of the idea. We must try to account for this sudden interest following hard on the heels of the lack of interest shown in responses to the previous question.

The only difference in the situation was the presence of the question; everything else was as it had been moments before. The alteration, therefore, had something to do with the question itself. Wages were known already to be good and most respondents gave that as the reason for their positive reply, but that alone cannot account for the change. Further, in responding to the preceding question, it was possible, theoretically, to imagine a job with the railways, but no one did this, save for the store worker who helped to unload store goods from the railway trucks. Since imagining was inoperative in replies to that question, there is no reason to suppose that it provides sufficient explanation now. The alternative is to posit that Aborigines treated the question from the concrete perspective and this resulted in a positive response.

Support for this view is shown, firstly, in the specificity and personalisation of replies. It is particularly clear in the women's responses. Men said only that they were interested in the pay. Women looked at how railway work would affect them and gave a few details. One mentioned the food that could be bought, others referred to wages, but two, by implication, objected to the drinking and prostitution that in their experience accompanied

working links with some of the fettlers. Despite the better wages, therefore, one woman rejected the idea of railway work. Station work, she held, was better. Her daughter qualified initial approval of work on the railways and then, in accounting for her response said, 'Big work. Get frightened of fettlers'.

Secondly, responses agreed with practical, everyday events and custom. In responding to the first question (example 9a), Aborigines refrained from thrusting themselves into an activity outside their usual sphere, but they responded positively to the opportunity when seemingly offered. Again formal proposition appears to have been interpreted in terms of reality, as occurred with the question about housing (example 8), thus confirming the contrast between Aboriginal and western use of abstraction.

Summarising difficulties encountered in questions seven to nine, Aborigines neither responded readily to a hypothesis advanced by the questioner nor introduced one themselves; nevertheless, if resistance was overcome, they accepted the merely imaginary idea as a concrete offer or suggestion, tied to the real. Evidence shows that questioner and questioned were using different degrees of abstraction.

Cause (examples 10, 11)

Questions that attempted to elucidate cause were also answered from a concrete perspective. As a result, explanations of events were all grounded in reality: either in final cause[5] or, if in efficient cause, then in a statement of fact or believed fact. No one advanced an idea as a mere proposition from which an argument might proceed.

Example 10

These two questions relate to the one just mentioned above (example 9a).

(a) **Some white people say that they would rather employ a white man or woman because some Aboriginal men and women do not stay at a job till it is finished. Do you think this is true?**

Women	Men
4—yes/true	5—yes/true
1—true: after a short time leave work	1—yes; stockmen only come home when work finished
1—some keep working	1—not true
	This man had just been dismissed from a cattle station.
1—yes, some	
1—sometimes	

An attempt was made to frame the query as widely as possible, but the reference to stockwork on cattle stations was immediately obvious to respondents, probably for two reasons: the employment in question was temporary, and men's work, such as mustering or fencing, fitted this description. Although occasionally women worked with the cattle,

they were usually employed in domestic work which was potentially permanent. Further, and this was probably the main reason for recognising the reference, station owners were known already to be dissatisfied with some of the younger Aboriginal stockmen. That was no secret.

As has been noted in other examples, the experience of self and close family was the basis for response. All but one Aboriginal agreed with the assessment of workers, but three qualified their answers: 'Some keep working'; 'Yes, some'; 'Sometimes'; and one made two mutually contrary statements: 'Yes' and then 'stockmen only come home when work finished'. This last respondent was an elderly man and probably in his day, living permanently on the stations, stockmen did not leave a job half done. One man who had just lost his job on a station, adhering to the specific and personal, disagreed with everyone else and denied the statement's accuracy. Again statements are concrete.

The next question pursued the topic, seeking causality.

(b) **Why do you think this is so/so said?**

Again, the significant feature of replies was their specificity. Every respondent gave a concrete reason, either a final cause or a particular efficient cause, sometimes softened by 'perhaps' or by a qualifying remark such as 'something like that'. Responses gave the impression of fact, with sometimes a degree of flexibility or of uncertainty expressed.

Women	Men: non-drinkers
1—like to go for holiday; see relations	1—like a holiday
1—want little holiday and then go back	1—don't know; like holiday
1—don't know; perhaps for holiday	
1—get tired	Men: drinkers
	1—less money given to Aborigines; don't like work; some people too rough
1—perhaps they are tired; hard to work alone; with relations is all right	1—money wrong, low; too hard work; boss goes on talking and Aborigine worker waits to find what to do
1—because they want to leave, want to live in own place	1—don't know; money wrong or something like that
1—to go home	1—don't know why leave
1—perhaps want to go to their own place—go home to Finke	1—don't like Aborigine people *He denied the statement in responding to the previous query*

A superficial difference of opinion separated drinking men from all the women and from the men who did not drink. This divergence was shown when, after general acceptance of the fact (that men leave unfinished work), respondents disagreed about the underlying cause. Women and the two non-drinking male respondents gave personal or

social reasons of one kind or another, or referred to being in one's own country. Half of them mentioned holidays, and it must be remembered that the workers in question had to go out to work leaving family and country behind. Holidays meant coming back to be with their own people and to be in their own place. Tiredness was another reason given. This expression was often used by Aborigines to refer to weariness of mind or of heart (rather than to weariness of body), and that was probably the use here. Sometimes a person would say that his/her spirit had dried up. One woman made these things explicit in her reply: 'Perhaps they are tired', she said. 'Hard to work alone; with relations (it) is all right'. Three other women also probably implied much the same. They said men wanted to be in their own place or to come home. All of these responses were based on sociability within the family and on being in one's own country.

The other five respondents were all men, all drinkers. One of them had no reason to explain why men leave the job, but at first sight the rest appeared to disagree with those above. Three mentioned money, but while this was no doubt part of the problem, among the drinkers also social and family considerations can be seen to rank high. A clue can be found by comparing their responses with those of the non-drinking men. For the drinker coming in from the job, paid off and with money to spend, drinking provided the social outlet that the holiday (noted by non-drinkers) made possible. The drinking man joined a group in which he was totally accepted, leaving a working situation in which he was disadvantaged and dissatisfied. Three men spelt this out saying, '(Whites) don't like Aborigine people'; 'Some people too rough'; 'Boss goes on talking and Aborigine worker waits to find what to do'. These statements seem to show that social reasons involved in walking off the job were generally important and had two aspects: the desire for social life and acceptance back at Aputula, noted by women and non-drinkers, and the social disadvantage and lack of consideration experienced on cattle stations, noted by drinkers.[6]

The above suggests that these Aborigines replied from the same or from a similar perspective, but that a person's answer reflected something of his/her own experience or that of close kin. Further, in their replies they cited either final or efficient cause but, in each case, provided a concrete reason for leaving work.

While these respondents considered why Aborigines leave a job, one man examined why whites accuse them of doing so. Having just been dismissed, he denied the original statement. 'Not true', he said (example 10a), 'but whites say this because they don't like Aborigine people' (example 10b). Like other responses, his reply was personal and his explanation concrete.

Example 11

Respondents were asked to explain the Westerners' pre-occupation with washing. The question was intended to explore respondents' knowledge of health and hygiene. Again, answers were specific, but while generalisation was theoretically possible, it may not have been a possibility for respondents. That could have required the use of more abstract concepts such as 'sickness' instead of the concrete notion 'sick' or unfamiliar abstract vocabulary such as 'hygiene'. For this reason the report is stated briefly without

giving the examples too much weight. Nonetheless, it shows again the concrete nature of replies.

Why do you think white people make such a fuss about washing?

6—to be clean/keep clean/to get clean/get clean/try to get themselves clean
3—stop smell/in case they smell/no sweat
2—learn since little/taught from kid
1—good to wash
1—when tired makes you feel better
1—because they have soap
2—don't know
1—(no comment)

In a summary statement, we note again that responses were grounded in reality.

The future (example 12)

Twice already questions have been raised about the future (examples 6 and 9a), and in both cases responses showed the use of concrete thinking. One more example provides further evidence.

Example 12

Aborigines were asked to consider their children's future.

Whites send their children to school so that they can learn and get good jobs. What work do you want Aboriginal:

(a) **boys to do when they grow up?**

(b) **girls to do when they grow up?**

Boys

13—cattle station work:
cattle work/riding horse/get bullocks/stockman/chop wood

1—anything they like—stockman
cattle station worker

1—big garage
had received some training as a mechanic

1—no work for them
her husband had found intermittent work in Aputula

1—railway
brother had worked on the railways

1—work like white man
store employee

1—make garden
school gardener

1—work (could not specify)

Girls

11—domestic work:
in house/for white/on station/washing/ironing/wash plates/housework/ kitchenwork

1—little bit of gardening
she had watered the garden after housework was completed

1—somewhere in town
his wife had domestic employment in Aputula

1—nothing for them to do: no work for them in Finke
with other women, she was unemployed

1—bring water, wood: work
she did not have paid employment; reference is to work of the camp

1—work in shop

With one exception respondents listed only things that they had already done themselves or that had been done by a member of the immediate family—spouse, son or daughter, brother or sister. The personal character of replies was very obvious in a number of cases; for instance, an unemployed woman commenting on girls' employment said, 'Nothing for them to do; no work for them in Finke'. Again, the school gardener said that a boy could 'make garden'. The odd man out, while grounding his answer in his own experience, lifted his horizon a little. He had received some mechanical training and for boys suggested a job in a 'big garage'. One other man seemed initially to open the way to something new. Of boys' work he said, 'Anything they like', but followed this with an example, 'Stockman', thereby grounding the idea in his own field, for he was a stockman of wide experience in cattle station work of all kinds.

Respondents' answers might perhaps be attributed to lack of ambition or to the limited work opportunities at Aputula, but that would not explain why suggestions were specific to respondent. It is possible that custom influenced replies so that uninvited, Aborigines did not presume to invade a new area of work. If that be so then, as before, they have invested both question and answer with an element of reality. Whatever the reason, these responses set out the children's future in terms of their parents' past and present.

The mode of these replies was the same as that of the earlier examples (6 and 9a), for all showed the same restriction of content. Nevertheless, Aborigines sometimes used their present as a jumping off place from which to extend experience. For instance, one respondent wanted to learn about stones, another more about cooking, and the third to live more like white people (example 6). Others again suggested work on the railway (example 9a) or work in a 'big garage' (example 12). All of these replies extended a respondent's present circumstances and as a result the way was opened for change. Moreover, without

the stimulus of a direct question, two people took a forward glance. In the first case, talking of Aborigines' houses (example 2) one woman said, 'good; will get better'. In the second, the ritual leader spoke favourably of children's schooling in the hope that later on they could write for him (example 4). Despite all this, the link with the real was still there. No one suggested something wholly imaginative; no one advanced an idea that was mere supposal or hypothesis. We see, therefore, that Aboriginal respondents retained the concrete mode of thought. This mode contrasts with the formality of questions.

Lastly, this treatment of the future was in harmony with the Aboriginal approach to both hypothesis and causality. Responses to all such questions were based in fact or believed fact and not in proposition. None of them introduced something that was merely imagined.

Aborigines' and Thursday Islander's responses compared

In many instances, replies from the Thursday Islander were indistinguishable from those given by Aborigines, but they differed from them in a few cases. Three are of particular interest. The number could perhaps be increased yet there is insufficient definition to be certain and, in any case, these three are enough to make the points. Using the same numbering as above for ease of reference, the Thursday Islander replied as follows:

Example 1: **Aboriginal people/you receive money when they/you work. Is this a little/all right/plenty?**

All right for self; station wages depend on owners.

Example 9a: **The station owners say that because Aborigines sometimes walk off a job before it is finished there will be fewer jobs for Aboriginal stockmen. What could be done about this?**

Get job somewhere else. Don't know what job they like.

Example 10a: **Some white people say that they would rather employ a white man or woman because some Aboriginal men and women do not stay at a job till it is finished. Do you think this is true?**

Depends on how white people treat them.

In two respects these responses showed significant difference from Aboriginal thought. Firstly, the Thursday Islander used propositional thinking: he generalised according to principles:

Station wages depend on owners (example 1)
Depends on how white people treat them. (example 10a)

In all the responses from Aborigines they did not do this, but adopted a different form.

The essential difference between the Thursday Islander's replies and those of the Aborigines is that he advanced a principle on which the result was contingent, but Aborigines answered in terms of actual experience. With example 10a, for instance, a statement was made that Aborigines walk off a job and respondents were asked for their opinion. Aborigines either agreed, disagreed or, by use of 'some' or 'sometimes', agreed

with qualification. In effect, the Thursday Islander put together observed facts, derived a hypothesis and, thus, a principle. This notion, if correct, would explain a particular situation. He remained dependent on his observations and on whether or not his hypothesis was correct, but that could be tested in practice. What he had was a means of formal explanation and cause from which predictions could be made. The Aborigines, on the other hand, observed but did not derive a formal principle. Instead, they used a known fact as the basis of their statements: some men leave cattle station work before the job is finished and, implicitly, some do not (example 10a). They were dependent solely on whether or not the observations were correct, and explanation was implicit or the event was its own rationale. In a sense Aborigines were prevented from looking into the future, for they must wait and see. While the Thursday Islander said in effect, 'It may or may not happen, but what does happen depends on. . .', the Aborigines said, 'This is what happens: some do; some don't. This is what is done'.

The other difference between the Thursday Islander and Aborigines was shown in the treatment of the future. The position is not altogether clear cut, but some insight can be gained. Replying in example 9a, the Thursday Islander appears prepared to take the initiative and to suggest tackling something new. If walking off the job threatened cattle station work, men could, he said, 'Get (a) job somewhere else'. He did not hypothesise that men might remain at work and in this his response was similar to that of Aborigines. But he added a comment of different quality: 'Don't know what they like'. This remark contrasts with Aboriginal responses since the jobs the men suggested were not what they might 'like' to do but what they had already done. Women did not reply. For the Thursday Islander, 'like' was the operative word. If work is unavailable on the cattle stations, what Aborigines will do 'depends on what they like'. That could open the way to change. If this reading is correct, unlike the Aborigines, when the Thursday Islander looks to the future he is free of the past, of the present and of location ('Get job somewhere else').

Concrete features of Aboriginal replies

Responses from the Thursday Islander are important because they help us to identify significant features of replies. They introduce contrasts that show more clearly the difference between thought that is tied to the real and thought that is free. They help to identify ways in which concrete thought was expressed, as the following three examples from Aborigines further show:

(a) qualification

(i) Use of 'some', 'sometimes'. These words were present in statements about walking off the job: 'some keep working'; 'yes, some'; 'sometimes' (example 10a); and again about rates of pay, 'little sometimes' (example 1).

(ii) Use of the conditional: 'might be (perhaps is. . .)'. In considering possible alternatives to stock work one woman said, 'Might be other work. Don't know what' (example 9a).

(iii) Use of 'perhaps'. Commenting on the desirability of railway work: 'perhaps good'; 'yes, perhaps' (example 9b).

In every case respondents accepted and worked from a factual base line and modified it by some means; no one attempted a generalisation as the Thursday Islander did when replying to the same questions (examples 1 and 10a), nor did they follow him by breaking free from present experience (example 9a).

(b) Stated alternatives

The application of concrete thinking was shown again in the use of stated alternatives, for instance, referring to rates of pay: 'some little; some big' (example 1); and again, evaluating railway work: 'not for some; good for others' (example 9b).

This use of factual binary opposition provides a means to compare two items, although without the use of comparatives. Elsewhere two words, 'better' and 'more', achieve the same result:

'big house better'	example 2
'house better than car'	example 8
'cattle station work better'	example 9b
'wages better than on stations'	example 9b
'to live more like white people'	example 6
'school kids have more than mother and father'	example 5a

Such words are restricted to comparing two things or groups of things; thus from a given base line, respondents implied something was better or something was more.

These three linguistic features—qualification, use of alternatives and comparison—show a concrete mode of expression in addition to the concrete content already observed. Further, they all conform to the use of binary opposition. This contrast is particularly clear in the use of the last two, the stated alternatives and the two-way comparisons.

(c) 'anything' and 'nothing'

Lastly, two words used by respondents could have shown Aboriginal thought that was free from reality, namely 'anything' and 'nothing'; yet in association with them concrete thought appears to be applied. Both of these words could be free of actual content but in each case were used with ideas that were not only concrete but personal as well. They were, thus, likely to be under this restraint.

of Aboriginal houses:	
'no nail, no iron, no nothing'	example 2
of things to learn:	
'read about tucker: anything—tea, flour, sugar'	example 6
of work for boys:	
'anything they like—stockman'	example 12

It is difficult to know how to punctuate these statements: whether one should use a full stop or a colon or a dash. Since the pattern repeats, since personal elements are present in

each instance, it seems that a full stop should not be used. The alternative punctuation (use of a dash) emphasises the actuality of replies and is the form followed here. The last example was the one that gave the strongest impression of formal thought, but even in that case it was unlikely. This is brought out by comparison with the parallel statement from the Thursday Islander. Of boys' work the two men said, respectively:

> 'anything they like—stockman'
> 'get a job somewhere else. Don't know what they like'.

In the one case, 'anything' is exemplified by 'stockman', by a man who at the time was a stockman, but in the other no limits are set—not even for place of employment.

It seems that, from a lexical perspective, the possibility was present to make the transition to more abstract thought, and so to break the direct link with the real; but the content was not present in the words.

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

As we have noted, the questions used in this chapter were not designed to suit our purpose. The evidence from them and from the associated answers is limited, therefore, in some respects. On the other hand, it gains in significance because, while totally random, at least from our perspective, it yields a coordinated result: culture, as we continue to observe, is a set of coordinated ideas.

In the first place, we have seen that questions were usually general in character, but responses conformed with Piaget's description of the concrete mode, retaining the link with reality. This result supports one of the explanatory tools derived by analysis of the world view, showing differences in degrees of abstraction used by questioner and questioned. In addition, indirect support is present for the other proposed tool, the idea of interaction. This support is brought out, in particular, through the comparison of Aboriginal and Thursday Islander responses. Consideration of Aboriginal replies shows that in association with concrete thought, and in a variety of ways, Aborigines set up binary or paired oppositions that were either stated or implied. The responses were at least consistent with this and, because binary opposition is closely associated with it, consistent also with the notion of interaction. While responses to questions did not support that idea directly, these particular replies conformed to the interactional perspective.

Next, by supporting the explanatory tools, responses in general were in keeping with the analysis of Pitjantjatjara language and provided direct support through the concrete content given to the concept of learning (examples 4-6), the use of direct dual comparison (example 1), the absence of hypothesis (examples 7-9) and the use of final and of concrete efficient cause (examples 10, 11).

Further, since question and answer reflected different orders of abstraction, the analysis showed also the effect of that difference on communication. No loss of understanding was likely in some cases (as in examples 1 and 4), but in others, without either party being aware of it, communication could be limited, or even lost. As a result, Aboriginal interest/lack of interest/initiative could be wrongly assessed (examples 2, 6, 9a, 12), as could

Aboriginal ignorance/knowledge (example 3). Another obvious area of misunderstanding, although again it might not be recognised by participants, was that of hypothesis. Westerners do not expect a generalised question to be received as a concrete proposal (example 7) or as having some basis in fact (example 8). Conversely, Aborigines expect whites to speak only in terms of reality. All these examples show that disparity in degree of abstraction does occur in the context of question and answer and that it results in misunderstanding between Aborigines and whites. At the same time, responses show only where Aboriginal interests and preferences lie, reflecting, therefore, cognitive performance (but not capacity).

Lastly, we have considered the influence that two Aboriginal customs may have on responses: that of minding one's own business and that of waiting for an invitation. These practices could encourage the use of the concrete mode and might account for personalisation of responses. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that they could account for all the findings. They would not explain the Aboriginal approach to hypothesis, nor account adequately for the method of comparison and related linguistic practice. Further, if the objective of Aborigines is to avoid intruding upon others and on their affairs, then one way to achieve that in western culture is to use generalisation. But Aborigines did not do so. These observations return us to the view expressed above that, in answering the questions, Aborigines preferred concrete to more abstract thought.

In short, empirical evidence supports the proposed explanatory tools. These features of the Aboriginal conceptual world contrast with those of whites. But while we have addressed the question of abstraction in some detail, Aboriginal use of the concept of interaction and the contrast between this and western ideas has not received the same attention. Before we use the tools to explain particular social events, that omission must be made good.

NOTES

1. The data were collected for a report commissioned by the Presbyterian (now Uniting) Church, for whom I worked, in order to assess the value of community development at Aputula.
2. Since our interest is in the main thrust of replies rather than in the detail, replies have been grouped under summary headings.
3. One said, 'House better than car', thereby using a comparative but still a two-way comparison tied directly to the real. See example 1.
4. This question has been rewritten, while retaining the sense. In the original set of questions it followed two others that set the stage for it (our examples 10a and 10b). Originally, it was phrased as follows: 'The station owners say because of this there will be less jobs for Aboriginal stockmen. What could be done about this?'
5. 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' Final cause: 'To get to the other side'. Efficient cause (concrete): 'Because the dog chased it'; efficient cause (theoretical): 'I don't know. If a dog were to chase it, it would cross' or 'It would depend on the circumstances'.
6. It could well be that Aborigines do not recognise the social divisions that exist in white society and that find expression in social acceptance or varying degree of distance.

8

The Second Explanatory Tool: Contrasting Concepts of Process

INTERACTION IN ABORIGINAL SOCIETY

The process of interaction was identified during the study of ritual. This concept of process is important also in understanding everyday secular events in traditional Aboriginal society. What is needed now is to define the term more precisely so that it can be used of certain, but not of all, social dealings. Definition will allow us then to contrast secular interaction with a different type of social process that in due course we shall define and refer to as transaction. We will find that interaction characterises all Aboriginal social practice, but in western society use is made of both interactional and transactional process. This contrast provides a way to explain misunderstandings that arise in the daily secular social and conceptual encounters of Aborigines and whites.

As an aid in defining interactional process, we recall three features of interaction that we identified during examination of ritual (chap. 3). First, interaction as a type of process gives a model *of* action, not *for* action. Second, the pattern of known relationship between known persons, both consanguineal and affinal kin, provides Aborigines with a means of classifying both the social and material universes. Using this model, they derive the classificatory kinship system and also, by applying it to the significant world, they derive the totemic groupings referred to as unities. These unities are the cosmic groupings between which the sacred process of ritual interaction occurs. Third, and related to point two, in ritual the process of interaction is undertaken not only in accord with the pattern of kinship, but in harmony with the conceived sacred functioning of the universe.

Taking these things into account and relating them to everyday affairs, the following two points can be made about secular process. First, since the pattern of kinship provides the basic structure for both secular and sacred activity, and since sacred interaction conforms with the sacred working of the universe, then so also do secular interactions. Second, in providing a pattern for all Aboriginal social action, kin relationship provides also a pattern whereby that action can be confined within specified limits. Accordingly, interaction does not occur indiscriminately throughout society but only in approved ways between those who are appropriately related; in the absence of such appropriateness it does not occur. In secular life, however, to suggest that every interaction that might occur actually does so is to leave out a number of relevant factors, such as the distance of classificatory relationship[1]. These considerations modify any seeming determinism and while the topic is of practical importance, our primary interest here is the principle of interaction. Practical issues, therefore, are set aside for the moment but taken up again under the heading 'Politics' (chap. 9).

In short, in Aboriginal society sacred and secular actions alike are interactions.

Furthermore, although differing in content, these two types of social action conform to the same pattern, since kinship underlies them both. We can then set out a general definition of interactional process and note related features. Social action undertaken between individuals or groups is referred to as interaction when its occurrence and content is determined by the kin relatedness of those taking part. Specific relationship determines whether or not interaction can or should occur, and it sets parameters on the content of that interaction. Through this process, specific relationship is put into practice. Since kinship always rests on a 1:1 relationship, number or quantification is irrelevant. Aborigines engage in interaction and can extend relationships, together with the appropriate behaviour, to non-kin; thus they easily fit whites into the classificatory kinship system.

TRANSACTION IN WESTERN SOCIETY

Considering now the social practice of whites, they also use a basically interactional process within the family and among friends, although the content of the activity can vary considerably. Interaction, however, is not adequate to cover the requirements of a large and materially complex society. In this setting, whites form business (including professional) relationships, such as employer-employee, doctor-patient, trader-customer, and these relationships they put into action. Associations of this type can be terminated and limits are set by factors such as goal, relevant skills and numerical elements, including quantitative concepts such as profit and loss, wealth, surplus, waste, and control of assets. In these cases kinship is irrelevant to the action that occurs, for only certain formal aspects of the total *persona* are involved. Such activity will be referred to as transaction. It arises within transactional society, contrasts with the interactional mode, and introduces a range of transactional concepts and business requirements.

Social action undertaken between individuals or groups is referred to as transaction when its occurrence and content is determined by the business (including professional) relationship assumed or negotiated by those taking part. This relationship is defined, and limited, in terms of factors such as those enumerated above. Specifically, kinship is irrelevant. Through a process of transaction, business relationships are put into practice.

Three points are important and two of these can be noted briefly. First, the transactional process associated with business relationship is integral to a large range of activity common among whites, but this type of process has no place in Aboriginal social practice.[2] Second, while interaction occurs between relatives, that is, known persons having known relatedness from birth, transaction is entered into through agreement by any persons. In other words, interaction depends on specific kin relationship, but transaction relies on the notion of relatedness itself, retaining no specific content but form only. As a result, having severed the direct link with reality, it can be described as a second degree abstraction while interaction, which has retained that link, is an abstraction of the first degree. This observation accords with our epistemological analysis, specifically the general contrast noted between Aboriginal and western abstractions.

Third, the above description of interactional and transactional process gives little more than a basic definition, and so some amplification is necessary on the one hand to fill

out the significance of the concepts and, on the other, to show their place in world view. These two related objectives can be reached by considering the relationship of social and natural processes.

INTERACTION IN ABORIGINAL WORLD VIEW

Sacred and secular interactions of Aboriginal society are in keeping with each other and also with the sacred working of the universe. This we have seen above, but we have not compared social process with the profane functioning of nature. If this proves to be similar, then from the perspective of Aboriginal world view, daily secular interactions will conform with the workings of nature, linking human daily life with events of the natural world. We examine that possibility now. The term *tjukurpa* was helpful previously in elucidating Aboriginal ideas of ritual process, and it is again useful here.

According to Stanner, the Dreaming is a number of things, and he listed the main elements. One of these is that the Dreaming is a kind of charter for all current events. Elkin, in a comparable statement, took the view that it is the ground of all that happens, as well as of all that exists. Although I have disagreed with the authors' interpretations, I too have found *tjukurpa* at the heart of Aboriginal conceptualisation of natural occurrences and significant for the present enquiry in two respects. First, it helps to direct a Westerner's questions towards Aboriginal concerns and away from his own preoccupations. For the Aborigine, events, no less than things, bear the *tjukurpa* quality: they happen as they do because that is how the events are, eternal and true; they are just themselves. When, therefore, a western investigator seeks Aboriginal explanation for the recurring events of nature, Aborigines do not refer to physical causes but instead to *tjukurpa*. Among others, Stanner has noted this type of response and belief (Stanner 1979:29) and so has Elkin (Elkin 1969:89, 98). Furthermore, as we have seen, Aborigines make the ontological assumption that physical existence and/or life requires maintenance or sustaining by human beings. By spiritual means they care for the whole universe, and as a result, nature continues her regular course (Elkin 1979:228) or continues to function harmoniously (Strehlow 1970:132). Human beings have a part to play and all of this is *tjukurpa*. That is the focus of Aboriginal attention, not physical cause, as we saw in the study of ritual.

Second, the *tjukurpa* concept opens the way to an elucidation of process in nature by introducing the eternal aspect of time. Since the normal, recurrent events of nature are all referred to as *tjukurpa*, eternal and true, we can conclude that Aborigines do not conceive them primarily in respect of ongoing time but choose instead to accent the eternal dimension. This agrees with Elkin's account of time (Elkin 1969:91-3), that is as Aborigines conceive it in daily events, and also with Stanner's view that time 'as a continuum is a concept only hazily present in the Aboriginal mind' (Stanner 1979:34).

It seems, therefore, that Aborigines treat process in nature as primarily interactional, for which chronological time is unimportant, instead of as a series of events that occur over ongoing time. Some support for this idea is available. For one thing, Aborigines do not conceive a causal chain reaction. Elkin (1969:93) noted this, and as far as it goes, the observation accords with our proposal. Nevertheless, while we suggest interaction as the

alternative to a chain reaction, Elkin directs attention elsewhere. He writes only that natural events or the processes of nature are grounded in the eternal Dreaming, and that they depend on its sustaining power. Since we disagree with his account of the Dreaming, this idea is unsatisfactory. With Elkin, therefore, we record the absence of a conceived causal chain reaction, but do not accept his proposed alternative, preferring the notion of interactional process effective in nature.

The validity of the proposal is further supported by reference to ritual, and we recall two points. First, in ceremony the process is one of interaction in which human beings and nature take a part. Nature is involved because both people and parts of the natural world, the relevant totems, are incorporated within the abstract, interacting unities. Second, we have noted Elkin's view, endorsed also by Stanner's work, that in ritual Aborigines cooperate with nature. We have differed from them about how this is achieved, but accept the idea of cooperation. Putting these things together, we can say that cooperation is effected by a process of ritual interaction in which nature has a role through the interacting unities. In other words, in ritual men do not coerce nature into an 'unnatural' or unaccustomed activity or into 'unnatural' or unaccustomed associations. Instead they cooperate with it, adopting a process conceived to occur spontaneously, or naturally, in nature itself. It follows that the profane processes of nature are conceived as causal interactions. Such an interaction could be shown, perhaps, through the ebb and flow of the seasons with their integrated ecological happenings.

Since sacred interactions are in keeping with the functioning of nature as well as with secular action, then the last two must be in accord with each other. This finding endorses the view expressed above that for Aborigines, all social exchanges conform with the functioning of the universe. In other words, the Aborigine going about his daily affairs, interacting with his relatives, acts in harmony with the natural world. At the same time through the patterned social interaction, he expresses his own individual place within the society and nature. In this activity he does not see himself over against the universe but at one with it. A concept of interactional process, inbuilt in the Aboriginal conceptual system, is therefore reflected in the understanding of how both nature and society function and in a person's perception of his/her place and role in that complex whole.

This Aboriginal world view, and specifically the understanding of natural and social process, differs from that of Westerners. On the one hand, Aborigines see their social interactions as conforming with the way the universe functions, and they align themselves with that functioning, cooperating with nature in a kind of perpetual interactional process that does not involve chronological time. Whites, on the other hand, from the perspective of their own world view, use their knowledge to take action on nature and to change their environment. In this undertaking social interaction, social transaction and natural process conform with each other, since all are chain reactions occurring through ongoing time. Cross-culturally, therefore, notions of social process differ in keeping with the world view.

Our interest now is in how these conceptual differences work out in daily affairs. As we have seen, they are in keeping with two different patterns of social action, the one kin based, the other resting on a different foundation. Nevertheless from the point of view of society and of what happens within it, the organisational principles underlying interactional

process are as we have described and are the same for Aborigine and white alike. They are common to social practice in both societies.

In the daily encounters between Aborigines and whites, the major difference is the one between interaction and transaction, and it is this feature that attracts our attention now. We look, therefore, at how interaction and transaction work out in daily events, giving a brief overview preparatory to applying this analytical tool to our data.

INTERACTION AND TRANSACTION CONTRASTED

Our first observation is that among Westerners, since they practise both interaction and transaction, it is possible for the two forms of process to co-exist in the one social event. In that case, for instance in a family business, interaction can put pressure on transaction, modifying its practical expression. Nevertheless, while a family business, or again an administrative agency, can accommodate some partiality towards kin and friends, the impartiality of transaction must remain dominant if the business is to survive and if the administration is to remain acceptable and achieve its recognised objectives. In the Aboriginal social setting, kinship, totem and country must control, for partiality only is culturally approved: interaction but not transaction accords with world view.

In the absence of transaction, understandably the process of interaction permeates every facet of Aboriginal social life, for instance economics. In this field, social relatedness provides a means of channelling and limiting the distribution of goods and services. Giving and receiving occur only between specific and appropriate kin, that is, when there is obligation to give and right to receive; but equally it does not occur when these rights and duties are absent. Under those circumstances, any refusal to take up an obligation amounts to rejection of relationship and, moreover, is contrary to accepted basic concepts (epistemology) and world view. Likewise, to give when it is not enjoined is equally disruptive. The Aboriginal belief system provides, therefore, an interactional mode for limiting the distribution of goods and services, but it does not moderate or control by quantity. This Aboriginal mode of limitation prevents distribution on a business basis, for such notions are alien to the world of totemic interacting unities in which Aborigines live.

In western society and culture, by contrast, transactional notions, including quantifiable ones, control the distribution of goods such as wages, government funds or the dividends of a public company. They determine also the reciprocal behaviour of owners, managers, workers and customers—all transactional concepts.

Again, in transactional society people can group together for united activity according to an agreed constitution that has nothing to do with relationships between kin. Furthermore, what an organisation, such as a club, decides to do is determined by democratic vote, a count of heads, and it can even terminate its affairs. This conceptual and practical world differs from the interactional one and so from the Aboriginal belief system and related social behaviour.

In a final example, the interactional/transactional contrast gives a means for considering the social contexts in which teaching and learning occur. In Aboriginal society and culture, relationship has an impact on both. We find that the teacher and the taught, who may teach

whom and thus who learns from whom, is so determined—for instance, mother's brother teaches sister's son.

In practice, therefore, in traditional Aboriginal society teaching is undertaken and learning occurs in the context of specific relationships. These activities are undertaken in harmony with the conceived functioning of the universe and, further, we can refer to them as interactional in type. These actions are interactions.

White people also teach and learn within the family and sometimes among friends, but such action is not restricted to this social group, nor would such a restriction be appropriate in the large, intellectually diverse and complex society. Among whites, the teacher-pupil relationship can be determined solely by the knowledge or qualification of the teacher, the pupil's goal, and numerical factors associated with finance. Whites do engage in some interactional teaching and learning but depend heavily on transaction in both fields.

This brief account is sufficient to show the contrast between Aboriginal and western concepts, in this case different views about social process. Further, as we have seen, according to the Aboriginal world view, the same interactional process characterises both social and natural events. Since interaction requires one degree of abstraction only, the contrast with western notions is twofold: in the nature of the processes conceived to occur, and also in the degree of abstraction inherent in those conceptualisations.

NOTES

1. In men's ritual, as I have been told but as a woman have not seen, distance of classificatory relationship carries no weight and prescribed interactions are meticulously observed (Paul Albrecht: personal communication).
2. Sometimes one hears of cases where an Aborigine noted for his/her ability in healing is consulted irrespective of relationship. I suspect that if examination were made, relationship could be claimed, perhaps distant, but activated for the purpose of the exercise. The notion of universalistic kinship is taken up in chap. 9 under 'Politics'.

9

The Aboriginal-White Encounter Explained

In Chapter 1, we observed that when ideas pass from people of one culture to people of a different culture, they undergo refraction. In other words, at the plane of refraction, or at the interface where two dissimilar cultures meet, ideas are refracted relative to their original ideological system. We further noted that not all ideas are affected to the same degree, if at all, but that when refraction does occur, the conceptual content of an idea is altered and communication impaired.

Both theoretically and empirically we have now identified two sets of conceptual features in respect of which Aboriginal and western cultures are different: Aboriginal culture favours thought that abstracts one step only from reality, while western culture favours the use of further degrees of abstraction. Again, social activity in Aboriginal society can be fully described in terms of interaction but Westerners use both interaction and transaction. In both of these respects, the cultural mediums are different. As a result, when Aborigines and whites encounter one another, a cultural interface is present and we can expect refraction of ideas and loss of communication. This loss can be described and understood in terms of the proposed contrasts.

It is important to note that the explanatory tools are constituted by *difference*, that is, they exist by virtue of difference and so also does the cultural interface at which refraction occurs. The point at issue, therefore, is not that Aborigines or whites use any particular degree of abstraction, but that when they consider events in which both take part, they can, and often do, use different degrees. Likewise, in the one event Aborigines and whites sometimes conceive process differently. This difference results in alternative expectations of that event and mutual misunderstanding.

It is pertinent now to use these tools in an attempt to understand daily encounters of Aborigines and whites.

As we have noted, the events that concern us took place mainly between 1968 and 1975. Each exemplifies an encounter of Aboriginal and white thought. While the physical contexts are often important, setting the stage and describing the action, the focus of attention is on conceptual difference and the consequences for communication between Aborigines and whites. Some explanations draw on the contrast in degrees of abstraction only, but the contrasting concepts of process are also useful in explaining most of the examples. And since these notions contrast not only in respect of type of activity but also in degree of abstraction, then the degree of abstraction is a feature in explaining all incidents. Examples that refer to abstractions only are considered first and are drawn from a variety of social contexts and places in Central Australia. Those that involve process are introduced next. Almost all of them are from Aputula and they take up the interrelated topics of economics: projects—preparation, principles and planning—and politics.

When most of the events occurred, I was community adviser and community development worker at Aputula. In this role my intention was to work alongside the people, traditional Aborigines on the fringe of white society. They had asked me to come because they wanted help in reaching goals of their own choosing so that they might take some control of the situation in which they lived. Since I am white, much of the resultant social and cultural encounter was mediated through my work, bringing communication problems into sharp focus for me. As a result a personal element is often present in the examples.

One general undertaking was that of education. Inevitably, as Aborigines undertook work or enterprises appropriate to transactional white society, they needed practical skills and material resources but also understanding. To provide that understanding was a continuing element of the work, and I used experiential teaching. There were two reasons for adopting this procedure. First, the Aborigines used it. For instance, one night a lad was told to clean a kangaroo. He had not previously had such an opportunity but now he was being offered a chance to learn. A specific method should be used and the lad must have seen the job done many times. No verbal instruction was given, but the man who was in charge stood by, turning away now and then, smiling but clenching and unclenching his hands as the lad made a mess of the job. Part way through, very quietly, the teacher took over. He said very little but instead showed, and the lad watched intently without speaking. Second, the experiential method of teaching was appropriate because Aborigines wanted to do things for themselves, and my objective for them was the same. In practice, we all helped each other. When an undertaking required action based on alien concepts, transactional or otherwise, the Aborigines had a problem on their hands although, initially, they might not recognise it at all. By drawing attention to key areas, over a period of time it was possible to show points of conflict and principles of operation necessary for whatever was in hand, and to do this in context. Having defined how things worked, Aborigines were able to overcome the difficulty in some way—or they rejected the idea, taking evasive action. At the same time, concepts and interactional practice of fundamental importance to Aborigines were highlighted for me: experiential education was also helpful for me as the community adviser. As will be shown, teaching someone how to do something and providing the funding necessary are, at most, preliminary exercises. To understand the cultural context and implications is more important and vitally necessary if tribal Aborigines are to have any real control of their lives.

REFRACTION AND CONTRASTING DEGREES OF ABSTRACTION

During day-to-day encounters, when whites used second degree abstractions, it was common for Aborigines to reason from concrete fact or believed fact. This practice was shown in multiple contexts and, at the time the following events occurred, was the cause of misunderstanding and mutual disappointment. Difficulties arose because both the Aborigine and the white assumed the other was using the same degree of abstraction as he/she employed. At best, whether both used the Aboriginal language or English, communication was sometimes reduced or lacking. This failure is not difficult to see in the following examples.

Abstract propositions

Example 1

Aputula Aborigines raised money through the sale of australites. One day in the course of conversation I said, 'If we go out for australites next week. . .' The Aboriginal people present received this comment as a definite plan and, returning to camp, told their relatives about the proposed trip. Not long afterwards one of these relations approached me asking to be included in the party. I attempted to explain that nothing was yet certain and the visitor went away. He made his report in camp whereupon, as I later discovered, Aborigines abandoned the idea thinking that I had done so too.

Example 2

On one occasion a white co-worker knew that I might be going to Alice Springs. He said to an Aborigine, 'You might get a ride with her. If she takes you. . .' Not long afterwards the Aborigine approached me saying, 'John says you will take me to Alice Springs'. This type of thing was common. An Aborigine interpreted a possibility as real, and instead of approaching the third party with a question and a request, he did so from the perspective of an arrangement already made. The third party was at least surprised, and if he/she refused to accept the proposal, the Aborigine was often embarrassed. In addition, there could be some degree of tension between the white who made the original 'promise' and the one on whose behalf the 'promise' was made, that is, unless they realised what had happened.

Example 3

Visiting an Aboriginal camp and uncertain of next week's commitments, I said, 'If I come back next week. . .' but the Aborigines thought, 'She will be back next week. . .' I was prevented from making the journey but found out later that Aborigines had relied on my coming and had made plans accordingly.

In each of these cases, degrees of abstraction contrast. Using a greater degree of abstraction, a white person advanced an idea intending something that was merely possible, but Aborigines treated the notion as a concrete statement of fact or of firm intention. This conclusion links intention and the future, an element present, although less obviously, in the next examples.

Collection of information and intent

Questions often caused confusion in general conversation because Aborigines treated the general question as if they were specific. This type of thing has been noted already in responses to the series of questions but can be exemplified in practical, daily affairs.

Example 1

Various government bodies and other agencies often met with Aborigines, and these Alice Springs meetings were attended by representatives from communities of the Central Australian area. Often the government's intention was to find out Aborigines' views and to listen to their hopes for the future.

The first of these meetings took place in November 1969 and was attended by representatives from Aputula. On returning home the men reported that they had asked for land and for water to be laid on to the camp. These things, they said, would soon be available. Representatives from other Aboriginal communities made similar reports, for instance the Pintupi. Expectation was high, but later, after this and similar meetings when the 'orders' were not 'filled', the whites were blamed for deceit and falsehood. On one occasion when realisation of a plan was delayed and delayed, one of the Aputula men said, 'White people are liars. They promise to give us things, but we have to struggle and struggle to get them. Aborigines are not like that. When they say something, they do it.' Immediate delivery, however, was not envisaged by government, for their enquiries were no more than exploratory and concerned with forward estimates.

Example 2

In more recent examples, attempts to discuss proposed legislation encountered the same difficulty. Northern Territory Government representatives attempted to talk about legislation before it was finalised, in order to incorporate Aboriginal ideas. Aborigines both in Central Australia and Arnhem Land accepted the proposals as the concrete base line and then each group discussed what effect such legislation would have on their community. They did not attempt any amendment.

Example 3

One day I asked Aborigines about their relatives at Ayers Rock. They identified a number of individuals and then someone asked when I planned to go there. Finding that this was not my immediate intention, one woman said, *ngunti tjapini* 'falsely asking', and Aborigines gave no further information.

Example 4

The community worker at Tennant Creek asked Aborigines on a nearby cattle station if they had thought about housing. Shortly afterwards the station manager was making enquiries, 'What's all this? You've been promising the people houses!' And explanations were necessary.

Again, in each of these examples, there is a contrast in the degree of abstraction used by whites and that used by Aborigines. In each instance, Aborigines incorporate an element of intention.

Sequential thinking

Sometimes the boot was on the other foot, and it was the white who was questioned.

Example 1

The Aborigine asked a friendly white to drive her home from the store. Seeing that the lady was old and that she had quite a load of groceries, he made a mental calculation about time and agreed. After she got into the car, she added, 'Wood. Got tea, sugar, meat. No wood.'

The Aboriginal woman was asking, if indirectly, for help in getting wood. This mode of asking in sequence, one request after the other, each succeeding request being dependent on an affirmative to the preceding one, was not uncommon and shows concrete thought. The alternative, more abstract mode, would be to present all requests at the same time, the subsequent and dependent ideas while the first necessary step was still unconfirmed. One result of the Aboriginal practice was that whites not infrequently felt that they were being exploited, and it was not uncommon to hear such comments as, 'Aborigines always spoil things for themselves. People try to help them but give them an inch and they take a mile. Can't satisfy them'.

While comment such as this could be justified, as it could of white people, it may not have been a legitimate assessment. The type of incident described occurred between whites and Aboriginal friends in genuine circumstances, without any intention to impose. The result was that in the example above, the five-minute drive turned into one lasting half an hour since differing degrees of abstraction were in use.

Example 2

The next example occurred in the context of a role play during a training session for community development workers. It is interesting, for in one respect it shows a move towards more abstract thought, but in another it demonstrates thinking still firmly embedded in the concrete. An Aboriginal man who had worked in Tennant Creek for many years was playing the part of an Aboriginal community member, and a white student was cast as the community worker. (The second character was accorded and accepted more control than was rightly his, but that is not the point of the example.)

Drawing on his own work experience the Aborigine asked if he could borrow a truck on Saturday. He wanted to pick up a load of rock ready for crushing. This was the first step before extracting whatever gold it contained. Under the circumstances the white agreed that the truck be used as long as the enquirer held the necessary driver's licence. After a little general conversation the Aborigine then asked for the use of a back hoe. In response to a query, he explained that it was needed to load the rock onto the truck. The white now realised that this vehicle was useless without the back hoe and finally agreed. The last question was, 'Are you doing anything on Saturday because I can't drive the back hoe'.

At this stage the role play ended in laughter, but the would-be gold miner was asked

why he approached the topic in that way. Why not give a list of requirements at the beginning? The reply was that he would not do it that way; he did it the way he thinks. 'That's the way I think', he said. In taking part in the role play, he used imagination to some extent, although without venturing beyond his own personal experience, but he also used sequential concrete thinking, establishing each step before moving on. This approach resulted in some loss of communication between the two, with the white under increasing pressure as request succeeded courteous request.

Imagining

A very experienced teacher reported that over the best part of a year, she had difficulty in getting her adult education students to imagine. All went well when the men were reading or writing about things associated with their jobs, but results were disappointing in other work. In the course of learning English the teacher asked them to write a few sentences pretending they were someone or something other than themselves. Possibly there were ritual reasons why this exercise presented difficulty, since from the totemic perspective a man would know that he was, for instance, kangaroo or emu or mulga tree or some other element significant to the group. It is possible, therefore, that the Aboriginal world view placed a restriction on sheer imagining, working against the use of second degree abstraction in much the same way as the customs noted earlier. Nevertheless, what the teacher wanted was a 'lift' from reality and, for whatever reason, the men had great difficulty. It was only after almost a year of trying that, at her suggestion, they made some tentative attempts, pretending to be a train—a non-totemic phenomenon from the white man's world.

Practising

Aputula Aborigines, Pitjantjatjara and Yangkuntjatjara, did not practise for an event. For this reason, if a ceremony or even a small segment of one was undertaken, then it had actual standing and was treated to the level of secrecy appropriate to it. Such events were not mere practice, although they could be integral to a series and in that sense preparing the way for a climax, such as the final initiatory rites. This contrasts with western behaviour, for whites often insist on practice, striving largely for improved performance.

Summary

All these examples show Aboriginal thought that is linked directly to reality. They show also that verbal communication may be limited and that Aboriginal and western participants may have different expectations of events. We have seen that these losses in communication appear to be due to the use of different degrees of abstraction.

REFRACTION AND CONTRASTING CONCEPTS OF PROCESS

At the beginning of an earlier chapter concerning Aboriginal ritual (chap. 3), we asked the question, 'What's going on?'. The same question is relevant to secular activity and, as we have found, the answer is the same. In Aboriginal society both ritual and secular activity is characterised by interaction, but Westerners often engage in transaction. As a result, in practice, misunderstandings arise between Aborigines and whites. They interpret events differently, for they have different ideas about the nature of action undertaken together. One result, as the following examples show, is that Aborigines and whites have difficulty in meeting each others' expectations.[1]

Encounters at the interface: economic affairs

Everyday economic affairs often require the actual handling of material goods, including money. This use of material things is the general focus in the examples that follow. What happens can be understood by reference to Aboriginal rejection of the business type of relationship and with it, quantification as the basis for distribution. As a result, interaction and transaction stand in sharp contrast.

The Aputula store

From the end of 1969 onwards, by virtue of an increase in their 'white-type' undertakings, the Aputula people, some more than others, came into increasing contact with the white conceptual world. One route by which this occurred was through the Aboriginal-owned store, a transactional project that drew on concepts of quantification and business relationship. While such requirements had been present earlier through Aboriginal purchasing from white-owned stores, previously these businesses had been run by whites. Now the necessity arose for Aborigines to use the concepts for themselves.

A brief historical sketch sets the stage for action. At the end of November 1969, because the only store in town was about to close, Thomas and Paul asked if it was feasible for the Aboriginal people to start their own. Money was in hand from private donations and this provided $500 starting capital. As things turned out, the previous store (a licensed business) did not close but was kept open under new white management. At the same time, the post mistress opened a store in a caravan. The licensed store remained open for only four months, but the caravan store was in business until the beginning of 1971. The Aputula store, therefore, had competition during the first two years of operation. Both the competitors and sometimes the hotel extended credit so that the Aputula store was forced to do so too.

On the day the store opened, Peter, the ritual leader, lent a hand by twisting coat hangers from scrap wire. The result was that he associated himself with the venture and his action, functional in itself, was significant also as functional interaction. However, from its inception the Aputula store was run by Thomas and Paul, neither of them a member of the ritually senior family. These men kept the keys and money and served behind the

counter. My role was mainly supportive and as a result I was seldom involved in selling. Nevertheless, due to the high level of illiteracy, I undertook the paperwork and much of the organisation necessary to obtain goods. For instance, I helped in counting cash and by filling in bank forms, but one or other of the men did the depositing itself. Thomas for the first time learned to write his name and with Paul learned to sign cheques. The thumbprint of one of the older councillors was also registered and was accepted by the bank as one of the two signatures required. A few years later, two written signatures were necessary on cheques, but not before this elderly man had established himself as a person of authority in the initiatives being taken. Since Paul worked elsewhere every weekday, Thomas took greater responsibility in the store, and it was usually he who collected and signed for goods received by rail. He also paid the station master what was due on freight. Other people also were drawn in to help. For instance, men, women and children gave a hand in unloading supplies, sorting goods, stocking shelves and cleaning the store. There was, thus, considerable community involvement.

Not all supplies were bought; many hundreds of dollars worth of groceries and second-hand clothing were received as donations. All these items were sold and were an important part of the store's function. Sales were slow during the first year for two main reasons: the competition from the other stores and the generally low flow of income into the community.

It was soon clear that Aborigines knew little about giving change. Instead there was a rather vague interchange of goods and money, a proceeding that there was no attempt to disguise or to hide. I presumed, therefore, that all was done in good faith and that quantitative aspects were only vaguely, if at all, understood. Sometimes the store was favoured but not often.

Quantitative considerations were put aside when selling fresh meat which involved making a connection between weight and price. The men used a set of household scales marked according to value (all meat sold at the same price per kilo), and I demonstrated its use for a day or so. As things turned out, while meat was placed on the scales and appeared to be assessed for value, it was not sold relative to this but according to the people for whom it was intended. For instance, a man came along on one occasion with 20 cents. There was a quick conversation between customer and shopkeeper to determine those for whom the purchase was being made; the people were listed and, on this occasion, counted. Enough meat for the consumers was placed on the scales, the dial observed, and the meat handed to the customer. No request was made for further payment. Again there was no attempt to disguise from me what was being done. As with change, all was done in good faith, and whatever caused the error (error as I saw it) was not simply something to do with arithmetic. This factor, whatever it was, involved something other than merely getting the sum wrong. What happened was that by counting the people, there was a qualitative use of number, if it can be put that way, to advance the interaction between persons. The distribution was not made according to the particular portion of meat, the traditional way to divide a kill, but against the number of persons for whom the purchase was made. By extrapolation, it is probable that this procedure was attributed by Aborigines to whites.[2]

In the end, by a process of experiential education, Aboriginal people first recognised that there was a problem and then narrowed it down. Shopkeepers in particular, but also

some other members of the community, came to see that a store, of its nature, presupposes the imposition of controls according to number, not kinship, and Paul gradually put this into words. Six months after the store started he said that money

uti	*puṛunypa*	*palu*	*kumpilpa*
obvious/easy	like	but	hidden/secret

'seems to be obvious but is hidden'

About the same time, Thomas asked to learn about change. Three months later Paul said that in the beginning he did not understand about money but now he could see—that always you had to get it, all of it. Under the circumstances it was surprising that the store stayed open as long as it did. It survived because trading was slow and because many gifts of groceries supported the store. A slow learning process was made possible, that is, time was given for the heart of the matter to come out. Thomas appeared slower to understand than Paul and was under greater pressure to extend credit (actually goods without payment), if only because he was more often in the store. For the last few months of Aboriginal management, Paul attempted to collect the correct money—'correct', that is, from a transactional perspective—but Thomas, for whatever reason, did not.

Finally, at the end of January 1971, thirteen months after it commenced, the store collapsed; there was little stock and even less money in the bank. Thomas and Paul came along together and acknowledged that they were unable to handle it, but they themselves identified the difficulty. Paul was the one who had tried the harder to adopt the transactional process and, at the least, he had been more successful in collecting payments. He now said that they could not refuse their relations. After a short silence he added the significant comment:

walytja	*wiya*	*puṛunypa*
relation	no	like

'like having no relation/relative'

Both remarks show that the men had recognised the difference between a store and a ration depot or, in the terms presented here, they had identified something of the difference between transactional and interactional process and relationships, something of the difference in the use of number instead of kinship for the distribution of goods.

Since the men wanted to keep the store, they asked me, a person outside the kinship system, to take over as storekeeper and to say the transactional 'No'. I acted as a kind of backstop for Aboriginal workers, so that I was the one who, finally, made sure that payment was made.

The same contrast between Aboriginal and western practice was shown in a variety of economic contexts. A significant feature of transaction is the control it gives in handling surplus. Numerical considerations are often a determinant between whites, but among traditional Aborigines, when receiving is in order, there is no adequate social mechanism to moderate its volume. As we have seen, people were paid in lump sums or received fortnightly social security benefits, and this transactional practice presented a problem to interactional recipients. One helpful idea was to use credit.

Aborigines used credit as a means of handling financial resources. They often sought to obtain it and were happy to run up accounts. At the end of the month, however, debits were often unexpectedly large. Problems arose due in part to lack of competence with number (a difficulty found also within white society), but there was more to it. For one thing, there was a certain status in being able to get credit and people pushed to get it. Further, in Aboriginal opinion, not infrequently expressed, the person who extended credit was the friend; the one who refused it was unfriendly. In practice, unreasonableness and unfriendliness were associated, both with refusal of credit and with demands for settlement.[3] Despite the problems, the advantages of credit were considerable.

When an Aboriginal was known to be in regular employment or in receipt of regular social service cheques, storekeepers were prepared to book up goods on account. This procedure was referred to as 'ticking up' and the credit received was 'tick'. Such a person ideally could get food every day with the obligation to 'finish off the tick' when his cheque was received. This arrangement was preferable to buying in a supply of goods for cash. When that was done, the provisions were soon eaten by relatives, but if only a little was to hand and available regularly, a more restricted group could benefit each day. In this way those who did not spend their money on liquor had a better chance of keeping it for food and of eating more of it themselves. Conversely, at the licensed store, more so than at the hotel, liquor was purchased on credit. By the same process this practice maximised the liquor bought but reduced the food available to the camp. Overall, however, the camp benefited with respect to food and clothing through the use of credit.

Problems arose when ticking up was beyond ability to pay. This possibility was more likely when there was more than one store, and often Aborigines were in difficulty. At such times credit was cut off or reduced until payment was made. Financial problems often arose when relatives, especially drinking relatives, arrived to stay. Local Aborigines took up their interactional obligations to give and visitors exercised their rights to receive. They lived on food provided for them, but spent the bulk of their own money on liquor until they had none left. After a few weeks, although usually with difficulty, the non-drinkers who were still feeding them bought train tickets for these relations and sent them off. Nevertheless, since authority also was based on kinship, this sending-them-off sometimes presented problems, and the police constable's help was sought if necessary.

Typical is the case of one of the aged pensioners, caught between interaction and transaction. This woman did not understand money or its value relative to goods and chronically had difficulty in keeping her tick within the fortnightly social security cheque. With her husband she was a permanent resident of Aputula and so was a good credit risk. On the occasion in question, a young woman relative and her husband had come for a visit; both were drinking heavily and both were depending on the elderly woman for most of their food. In a short time at the white-owned stores she ran up tick in excess of a month's pension and, being worried, she brought the accounts to me. When cashing her next cheque, in an attempt to show the woman the extent of her indebtedness, I made a long line of $1 notes to the value of her tick and beside it, a much shorter line to the full amount of her pension. This exercise was undertaken in the Aboriginal-owned store in the presence of other people, and, as often in the past, we looked at an actual concrete problem, hers this time, and talked about what might be done. The white storekeepers were condemned by one and

all for being greedy, but the Aboriginal visitors were not mentioned at that time. I suggested to the woman that she take her time in paying and that with her husband and others she go out camping. This proposal was in keeping with Aboriginal practice, for Aputula Aborigines often went out camping by choice. The idea also had advantages: it removed the woman from the white-owned stores and further ticking up; it removed her physically from those depending heavily on her for food, in this way freeing her from the obligation to give; it made it possible for her, and her husband, to dig and shoot rabbits to supplement their diet; and lastly, artifacts for sale to local and Alice Springs markets could be made from readily available timber, thereby increasing the income. Meantime, the Aputula store could supply her with food. By taking this action, in two and a half months with her husband's help the woman paid all debts, including those incurred with the Aputula store. In addition, she purchased train tickets for the relatives.

Such problems were common but can be understood when the contrasting ideas of process are taken into account. Of particular importance is the mode of distribution of goods and the mode of limitation on that distribution.

The government grant

Concurrent with the store project, other developments also required Aborigines to handle material resources and to handle them within their own community. Again, problems of conceptual origin arose.

Finance for the first of these developments was received by the Aboriginal Council (August 1970) in the form of a $5000 grant from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Prime Minister's Department (from 1972 the Department of Aboriginal Affairs). It was to support self-help projects to be identified by council and community. At the time there was no incorporated group, so that the money was to be administered in the interim by three trustees: a member of the then Alice Springs Welfare Branch, an Aboriginal nominated by the Aputula Council, and me.

On receiving the grant, the council met to choose a trustee. Paul, the Christian leader, spoke first. He said that God had promised (it) and now he (God) had given Aputula the money: 'Here it is'. Paul then nominated himself, saying to Thomas, 'You keep the store'. No one else said anything and he took up the position. The men's first thought was to buy a Land Rover. I vetoed this idea and was later supported by the other white trustee. This divergence of opinion was not the only one, as will become apparent.

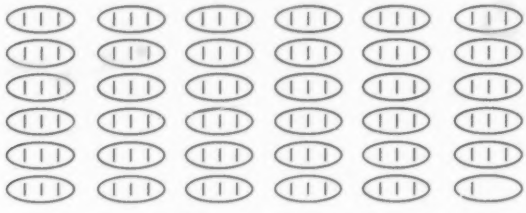
The greater part of the grant was used for capital development. For instance, since the men wanted to sell fresh meat, refrigerators and a second-hand cool room were purchased for the store. Materials to build septic toilets were ordered for the camp. The grant, therefore, did not immediately put much cash into the community, but some was used at once to provide work. Jobs were not easy to find, but three projects were undertaken, one of which shows clearly the practical difference between interaction and transaction.

Aborigines had applied to lease land, and although these leases had not yet been granted, posts were cut ready for fencing. A problem arose when it came to paying the post cutters. This was similar to those met in the store, but from the transactional perspective

difficulties were aggravated by inadequate organisation. On the first occasion, the men agreed to work for the then usual price, 20 cents per post at the stump. And so, loading up the rations, I drove them out to their chosen location and arranged to pick them up about a week later. They took four axes only but decided on a party of eight, three councillors to do the chopping, three younger men to hunt and two women to do the cooking. By this arrangement the older men were supported by younger men and by women. Meantime, councillors did the productive work immediately relative to the grant. A parallel can be drawn with ritual activity, in which such a procedure is advantageous from the interactional point of view. It is nonetheless disadvantageous from a transactional or quantitative perspective. As it turned out, the hunters were largely unsuccessful, and the men were 'hungry for meat' without which they said they could not work. Further, thinking that perhaps they had enough posts, no work was done for one and a half days. This was due partly to inability to count accurately and partly to lack of leadership. In all, on this occasion, 106 posts were cut: on the average of four and a half per axe per day, or three per man per day.

When the time came for payment, already the value of the rations taken with them amounted to more than the agreed sum. In attempting to explain this situation, I talked and demonstrated with money, laying out 20 cents per post. I drew a chart in the men's presence, explaining as I went along, using a single stroke for each post. In this way I attempted to show the number of posts cut per man on each of the six days and the number of 20 cents due to each of the six men. Then we talked some more about the chart:

Posts per man in six days



(| = one post, ||| = one average day's output)

After discussion we agreed on a cash component, plus the rations (which no Aborigine regarded as pay). As a result, the cost per post jumped to a little over 50 cents, an increase in transactional terms of 150 per cent. But the men expressed dissatisfaction, and Paul was worried and said so. He, as trustee with me, was required to sign the cheque for payment. At the same time, he agreed that it would be easy to cut twenty posts per day and admitted that three only had been cut—yet Paul still wanted to pay more. Discussion took almost the whole morning.

The next post cutting was undertaken when I was away and the men worked from Aputula itself, having agreed on $1.00 for three posts. This time only five men worked and ninety posts were cut. Discussion about pay was again long and slow. Again, I drew charts to show the relationship of money and posts; money itself was used. This time one of the workers called two independent witnesses, both councillors. These two agreed with me,

but did not say so then. Instead, they listened quietly, but later said the men should not be dissatisfied. But I made no headway with the post cutters nor with Paul. Again they were unhappy with a payment of $1.00 for two posts resulting in $9.00 cash each. When the time came for payment, Paul arrived early, signed the cheque and then left, dissociating himself from paying out. Later, he commented that when Aputula has a lot of money he cannot understand why it appears to be so little.

A few days later the full council arrived for further talks. The heap of posts was still on the ground, and so we went over and set the timber out in five equal lots. One lot we identified for each worker, then set his posts in pairs. Lastly, we counted the pairs. Since everyone knew that they had received $9.00, that was not disputed; they were able to see that they had received $1.00 for two posts (when they had agreed on three). Suddenly everyone smiled; no more discussion was raised and the men dispersed. I concluded that my basis of payment was understood, not from anything that had gone before but from the physical demonstration. But no more posts were cut although 100 more were needed, and men were out of work and not receiving unemployment benefits.

The puzzle was to understand why, when in white terms pay was generous, the men refused further work and why Paul dissociated himself from responsibility in paying—at the practical face-to-face level of actual paying out. Particularly after the physical demonstration with the posts, it could not be lack of communication. Moreover, all these men were familiar with selling dingo scalps and australites and artifacts. Why then be dissatisfied about the sale of posts that, in addition, were for their own fences? Further, the post cutters did not seek a numerically large additional payment, for $10.00 each would have satisfied them. Moreover, at other times when money was known to be in short supply, considerable work was done for very little, as, for instance, when the men built a horse yard for the camp to use.

The answer lay in the fact that the money for reimbursement was already within the community, that it was known to be substantial, and that transactional, numerical considerations were not paramount (neither were they for the horse yard). When items such as australites were sold, money was not in Aboriginal hands but controlled by some outside agency. For the posts, by contrast, it was within the community, available for intra-community use, and there was plenty of it. Initially, lack of facility in counting and with abstract charts could have been substantial considerations, but these problems were overcome by concrete demonstration. Yet, when it came to the crunch, dissatisfaction remained and the quantitative basis for assessment was rejected by those directly involved. Instead, money was regarded more from an interactional perspective and not in transactional terms, not according to the business relationship I had used. This reading is supported by Paul's comment that the money is a lot but appears little.

At the same time men not immediately involved in the situation took a different view. It could be argued that they took this position to please me, and I cannot disprove this interpretation. One of them said that if you do not do much work, you do not get much money. Whether this was an observation from practical experience or agreement with a quantitative assessment, it is not possible to be sure. Again, there may have been political overtones. The men may have realised that by refusing to allow money intended for everyone, themselves included, to be channelled to the advantage of a few, I supported the

community and them as well. Alternatively, they may have realised, at least implicitly, that in effect I was saying 'No', as I was requested to do in the store. But those directly involved, those who had taken part in the interaction, rejected a transactional process. When the watershed was reached, they withdrew from it, rejecting the use of number, Paul by distancing himself from paying and the post cutters by refusing further work.

In the event, a collision occurred that was not resolved: neither the Aborigines nor I gave way. The analysis suggests that more than politics and more than self-interest were involved. Rather, difference was rooted in alternative conceptualisation of what was happening, that is, of the nature of the action in which participants were engaged.

Criticism of my action is no doubt in order from some perspectives, but the issues are not simple and, in any case, I do not take up such considerations here. My purpose has been to record what happened and to attempt an analysis.

Encounters at the interface: the bureaucratic world

By looking at funding and at two interrelated projects at Aputula, we take up two aspects of the Aboriginal-white conceptual encounter. In the first section, Aboriginal thought comes to grips with administrative requirements for funding in general; in the second, we see an encounter of Aboriginal and white thought in the context of planning and assessing projects.

Incorporation

Further economic concerns brought Aputula Aborigines into wide contact with western transactional administrative requirements.

After the first grant was made early in 1970, word was received from the Federal Government that grants of money would be available to incorporated Aboriginal groups. The intention was to finance projects identified by such bodies, including the building of houses, and involved much larger sums than the original $5000. Aputula people were already interested in housing and some had applied for land within the town area, so the next step was to form an incorporated body.

I had difficulty in explaining the notion of incorporation, probably because it presupposes the transactional perspective. For incorporation, people were required to group themselves together on the basis of a planned purpose; membership was to be determined by choice; authority was transactional in type; a fee was required to join; and dissociation was possible. The structure of such an organisation would contrast with the traditional Aboriginal totemic groupings, and in its mode of operation transaction would replace interaction. While Aboriginal people said that they were pleased that money was available and while some of the men came to ask how to get this money, after that nothing more was said. Over the next few weeks all men of authority, one after another, went away: one here, one there. Reasons included holiday visits to relatives and attendance at the hospital in Alice Springs. I concluded that understanding was lacking and delay inevitable.

Later, with continuing discussions, I was able to convey something of the idea, at least

to arouse interest to the point where Aborigines responded. The first meeting of significance was called by the councillors in June, and the first thing they did was to clarify council membership. Paul rose and said that while previously he had not been a councillor, now he was. He added that this was needful because the government 'knows the council'. Before this time, while he appeared to me to have been a councillor, Paul had preferred to be referred to as the church leader. He went on to identify the rest of the council. Two others were currently acting and three more, who had been on holiday, were taking up duty again. Paul then asked me to speak and to go through a suggested draft constitution. This draft had been prepared by an Alice Springs solicitor. The meeting decided that the incorporated group be known as the Aputula Social Club Incorporated. Those eligible for membership were the Aboriginal residents of Aputula, their relations, and since someone was required to write and look after the money, me—an offer I declined while agreeing to be a servant of the club. The council was chosen to be the executive committee, a membership fee was set, objectives were listed. These included social, educational and recreational activities. In carrying out these aims the club had power, for instance, to acquire land, to build, and to establish and run businesses. The store was to be under the control of the club. The amended draft was returned to the solicitor who, in due course, sent the document back to Aputula with the necessary corrections. After this it was read, discussed and finally approved after two meetings of the council. During December word was received that incorporation had been approved.

The whole process had taken ten months. Delay was caused initially by my failure to arouse significant interest, due to problems in explaining the white notions involved and by my refusal to take any initiative by calling a meeting myself. Necessary legal formalities delayed it further. But in the end a degree of understanding was achieved. The fact that the council was brought to full strength at the beginning of the initial meeting shows the importance placed by the men on what they were doing and their acceptance of responsibility. Some conceptual difficulties were avoided, maybe not deliberately, and an interactional element injected by appropriate determination of membership and by the use of someone outside the kinship system to do the writing and to look after the money. Particularly significant was the decision that the council be the executive committee. As we have seen, these councillors were all senior people in their own families and between them were able to speak for and exercise traditional authority over the whole community. In other words, their election accorded with interactional rather than transactional requirements. At the same time a determined and sustained effort was made by the Aputula people to come to grips with transactional perspectives. Within corporation the stage was set for receiving considerable assistance from government. As a result of that assistance, western administrative procedures became increasingly important as contacts were made with departments and other funding agencies. These considerations introduce the next topic.

Planning and assessment

While they may not be stated or even consciously recognised, significant factors for any project are the principles or assumptions that underlie it. The importance of this is

brought out in the following discussion and a key element is the interactional-transactional contrast.

At Aputula housing was one of the main projects, but from it grew a further undertaking, the housing factory. In practice the manufacturing stage was barely reached, but the enterprise was referred to by that name or sometimes by the alternative term, the Construction Company. Except for brief visits I was away for two years from February 1971 to March 1973 when work on both projects commenced; thus some of what follows was gathered directly from Aborigines and some from John McNeil, the white man most closely involved. Both the local housing programme and the housing factory that grew out of it were important in themselves, but their chief significance for us lies in the conceptual contact that arose through them. Under the present heading we examine the encounter of Aboriginal interaction and the transactional concepts of white administrators. Later we consider what happened in practical daily affairs. A brief historical outline is necessary.

Houses at Aputula were designed and built by the Aborigines with the assistance of McNeil and an architect based in Alice Springs. Finance in the form of a grant was received from the Federal Government, through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and work started in 1971. By 1973 six houses were up and almost finished, but finished or not, the Aboriginal people moved in. Work continued slowly on these and other buildings and, in a related administrative change, in order to comply with new funding requirements, the Aputula Housing Association was incorporated. Having learned something of the procedure from the earlier incorporation of the social club, this time the Aborigines had no difficulty and took the steps necessary without hesitation.

Then in 1974 in response to a DAA instruction (sent to all Aboriginal housing associations), a three-year building programme was submitted. The first two years of this work were completed within the time set, that is by mid 1976, but almost at once, in association with the budget brought down in the House of Representatives, all further funds were cut off pending an enquiry into Aboriginal housing. Finance was available only to those housing associations that had not finished their programmes. At Aputula with the work up to schedule and, therefore, with little money in the bank, Aborigines and whites alike were thrown out of work. An approach was made directly to the Prime Minister (Malcolm Fraser), and since it was favourably received, six weeks later a letter arrived guaranteeing funds. This letter was acceptable to the bank, pending actual receipt of a cheque, and work started again.

While these things were occurring, the other related project, the housing factory, had been taking root at Aputula. McNeil pointed out to the Aboriginal council that when all the houses were finished Aboriginal people would be out of work. He asked if, in council's opinion, Aborigines in other places might like the same type of dwelling. If so, then it might be a good idea to try to start a housing factory. Houses built at Aputula could be the prototypes of those offered for sale. The men said later that, while the ideas were not theirs, straightaway they saw that they were good; so they backed the suggestions enthusiastically. On their behalf, therefore, McNeil applied to the DAA for funding to start a factory and on receiving approval in principal, lodged a detailed submission in June 1971. Since a loan was sought (not a grant),[4] the Federal Government required a feasibility study, that is, that the proposal be investigated for likely commercial viability and for the resources of skill

and money needed. Finally the plan had to be submitted to the Treasury for approval. The DAA appointed management consultants to make the initial assessment and these, in turn, engaged a building company to assist them.[5] More than two years later they were still unable to reach a conclusion. In 1973, therefore, they sought a further brief and further finance to continue their investigations. Instead, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs made a grant available to Aputula and appointed professional men to assist the factory. Eventually, there were two architects, one to work on design, the other to sell houses (mainly in Central Australia) and to supervise their erection; there were also accountants to do the bookkeeping, to cost houses and to invoice customers. All of these people were based in Alice Springs.

Liquidity proved to be a problem in the beginning and it remained so. Two years after the factory commenced, towards the end of 1975, the factory manager, McNeil, was dissatisfied with the performance of all consultants except that of the design architect. He attempted to have their work assessed, and to this end sought the assistance of the Aboriginal Housing Panel (a research body funded by the DAA and connected with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects). This action resulted in two reports from the Housing Panel, both of which examined the factory project itself. The first report was submitted to the DAA at the end of the year and the second, undertaken in association with consultant accountants, in April 1976. They used a narrowly economic frame of reference, overlooking social and cultural factors. This affected their assessment which was adversely critical of the Aputula Construction Co. In the end, despite their report, the DAA provided finance to overcome the liquidity problems. At the same time the company undertook to make no further requests for government assistance. For several years it continued to run at a profit, but after McNeil's retirement and due to subsequent problems, eventually the company went into voluntary liquidation (1981), but was able to discharge debts in full. While at the last it was largely removed from Aboriginal control, to the end it did provide work and some income from profit.

The following time table summarises major events:

	Aputula Housing	Aputula Construction Co.
1971	funds received; work started	application for funds; feasibility study commissioned
1973	6 houses almost complete and factory started	assessment of proposal incomplete; funds supplied
1974	3-year building programme submitted and approved; funds granted for 1st year.	work progressing

1975	funds granted for 2nd year	work progressing; factory sought help from Aboriginal Housing Panel
		preliminary assessment of factory
1976	2 years building complete; funds for 3rd year frozen but two months later funding granted	final assessment; funds supplied; factory agreed to request no further assistance
1981		Construction Co. closed; all creditors paid in full

The above sets out a minimal historical sketch of confused and protracted transactional events, all of which had implications for Aborigines at Aputula. Attention is directed now to the interplay of Aboriginal and western thinking that resulted. This encounter occurred initially when the factory proposal was examined for feasibility and again when the project itself was examined by the Aboriginal Housing Panel. To appreciate what was involved, some attention must be given to the ideas upon which the Aputula submission was founded and to the ways in which they were put into practice.

The plan for the Construction Company was devised largely by McNeil, with assistance from J. H. Downing, a qualified social worker. McNeil consulted with the Aputula people and, in addition, had had considerable experience through working alongside other Aborigines on construction jobs. In the course of this work he had found certain principles effective. He was already applying them in the Aputula building programme and intended to adopt them as policy in the proposed factory. These ideas took account of community development objectives and so were directed towards the development of people both as individuals and as members of a community. The view was taken that opportunity for growth would emerge as Aborigines identified their own goals and took part in achieving them. The general policy was to respect Aboriginal social practice and authority. From the beginning this respect was reflected in the working policy by having frequent meetings with senior Aborigines and also with other interested members of the community; by including the older men in the work force; by taking account of the present skills of that work force; and by building on those skills using experiential education. Teaching was given in the actual working situation, on the job. In practice, what happened was that ideas identified from early work, if in somewhat rudimentary form, were developed and applied with greater effectiveness and understanding as work progressed.

At Aputula the number of men available for work was about twenty, most of whom had never attended school and none of whom was literate. Their skills were either traditional or those learned in the cattle industry (for all had been stockmen) and included acute powers of observation and retentive memory. It was expected that the abilities of

factory customers would be similar. In keeping with the principles adopted, what was needed was a house that complied with building regulations but was of a type that *these* men could build, and build with a minimum of white assistance and supervision.

As we saw in the historical account, a suitable type of house was identified through the local building programme, and it was proposed that it be offered for sale through the factory. What was advocated was a method of construction based on the use of modules. These modules were suitable for a wide range of buildings and so designed that many of the parts could be dismantled and reassembled to another building plan. The idea, therefore, was not for a particular house design, nor even for a particular kit or prescribed set of housing parts.

McNeil found that the Aputula men were capable of building the houses and that after initial instruction they could do the work without supervision. Even so, the help of tradesmen, such as an electrician and a plumber, was necessary from time to time. These men did not live at Aputula but visited as required, providing skills and other resources not otherwise available.

The Aputula type of house was proposed for the factory for two main reasons: first, because the Aputula people liked the houses and were able to build them; second, because in the factory Aborigines would handle components with which they were already familiar from building their own houses. As a result they would understand the significance of the various items. This knowledge would provide a foundation for continuing experiential education. Teaching would be offered in the factory and would proceed through a series of stages. At first, since Aboriginal men did not have the skills needed for manufacturing, subcontractors in other places would process or manufacture all the materials. These materials would be received at Aputula in bulk and Aborigines would start work in the factory by sorting them into suitable bundles and despatching them to customers. Later on, they would be able to undertake simple manufacturing procedures, such as drilling holes to specification, and from their own building experience they would know why those holes had to be drilled accurately. Progressively, as abilities increased and using suitable jigs, they would take more responsibility, moving on to more complex and demanding work. As skills were mastered locally and as facilities became available, the proportion of subcontracting would be progressively reduced.

From a small start, therefore, the local input would grow—including skills useful in administration. Seeds for general growth were present but no one knew how slow that growth, if any, might be, nor the difficulties that might be encountered. In the event, by working together, whites and Aborigines learned from each other, but a number of difficulties arose. Some of them are discussed in due course, but for the moment we consider the plan itself. It had great flexibility, including the possibility that subcontracting work might be undertaken by other Aboriginal groups.

While the factory proposal conformed with necessary transactional requirements, for instance, in respect of finance and of work performed, it met also the interactional requirements of the Aputula community and workers. As a result, it conformed with their conceptual world, including their ideas of process. This last was not deliberately planned, nor was it realised at the time, but it came about as the necessary consequence of the policy pursued. In other words, by aiming to satisfy Aboriginal aspirations in a socially acceptable

way, the steps taken conformed also to the Aboriginal cultural and conceptual world. Traditional interactional process was not disturbed but instead was expressed in new ways as new skills were progressively acquired. Consequently the basic pattern for action, deriving from kinship and common to both sacred and secular activity, was maintained.

In a further respect, but in this case entirely fortuitously, the factory accorded with Aboriginal thought. That occurred because, as we have seen, the idea grew out of the local building programme and as a result was an extension of the present. This attribute may have contributed to the men's ready acceptance of the plan.

This, then, was the proposal and the ideas behind the Construction Company. Of importance was the use of modules, but success depended also on such factors as the adequacy of their design, the adequacy of jig design, the suitability of staff who would put policy into practice, and the interest of prospective customers.

When Aputula first applied for funding for the factory and the feasibility study was undertaken, a conflict of views arose. This conflict occurred because assessors gave more overriding importance to transactional factors than did applicants. For the same reason, the same difficulties were present when, after two years operation, the factory project itself was assessed. In other words, the policy inherent in the plans, or the perspective from which they were devised and executed, was replaced by a different one. Effectively, the basic question, 'How can this be done by these people?' was replaced by 'How can this be done?'.

As we have seen in the historical sketch, the first report was that of management consultants who examined the initial application for funding. In effect, they rewrote Aputula's proposal and then conducted their study relative to the revised ideas. In the course of this revision, the nature of the submission was changed so that transactional principles were applied throughout and interactional ones eliminated. For instance, by requiring formal education, by placing the accent on skills and on the authority structures to match, the new plan presupposed business relationships between workers. This idea did not take account of the abilities of the aspiring work force and contrasted with traditional working relationships and with interactional authority, both determined by kinship and ritual factors.

In another change, the factory now proposed was much larger than the original; there was even some talk of a spur railway line to service it. As a result it would have been necessary to import additional Aboriginal labour, thus increasing the size and social complexity of the community. While a population increase might be accommodated in an interactional setting, it would at least complicate the situation. It would be further complicated if, on transactional grounds, newcomers were given authority over people of local ritual standing. This importation of labour was a necessary part of the altered plan but only an optional feature of the original. Again, the new plan required relatively complex equipment with white technicians to maintain it and, because of the sheer magnitude of the proposed operation, an increase in the number of management and administrative staff. As a result Aputula Aborigines would have had little chance to take a real part in decision making and would have been unable to take any real responsibility at Aputula for many years. What looked like an improvement in transactional terms was the reverse in

interactional ones. It was likely to be socially disruptive, of doubtful value to the community, and further, of doubtful economic viability, a point of interest to transaction.

After two years work, as noted, this initial study was incomplete, but the Department of Aboriginal Affairs decided to proceed. Funding was provided, the Aputula Construction Company was registered and the factory started in terms of the original proposal.

The second and third assessments, as we have seen, were undertaken by the Aboriginal Housing Panel after two years of factory operation. They reviewed not a proposal but the project itself. The reports, like the first one, were transactional in character and from this perspective were critical of factory operation and management, of architectural design, and of Aboriginal performance and educational achievements. Proposals for change were likewise transactional, advocating massive reorganisation of the factory and a substantially altered product.

The Housing Panel's reports can be supported in part, but there is much that can be questioned and refuted. Such issues are not our present concern but rather the significance of the perspective from which all the reports were written.

There is little doubt that there was a loss of communication between assessors and assessed and, further, that this was not recognised by the assessors. If no more than difference in opinion was involved then we would have hoped to receive a report that reflected this difference, one that included some discussion to justify the stance adopted. For instance, in the second and third reports we would have expected some critical analysis of the Aputula working policy as such and/or some reasons to explain why significant Aboriginal practice could not, or should not, be accommodated in factory operation. No such comment was given. In practice what happened was that social factors of a traditional nature and of importance to Aborigines at Aputula were identified by the whites who worked there and were respected in the factory. These factors were treated as irrelevant to the project by the whites who examined it. As a result, because they did not take account of these social factors, the examiners failed also to allow for related conceptual ones, significantly for the Aboriginal world view. Their reports, therefore, favoured the transactional but neglected interactional ideas.

In short, in a cross-cultural situation white professionals failed to recognise the significance for their investigations of relevant social and cultural factors. Their enquiries were not based broadly enough. As a result they were unable to make a constructive examination of the Aboriginal project and of the Aputula Construction Company. They were unable also to assess adequately the achievement of traditional people and the levels and relevance of the aptitudes of staff and the necessities of management. Bookkeepers' economics and western administrative practice must be taken into account, but they do not provide adequate parameters for calculation of the probable success, or of the strengths and weaknesses, of a venture of the factory's nature and circumstance.

Nevertheless, funding depends on reports and assessments such as these. Consequently the Aboriginal-white encounter that occurs through them and the loss in communication can weigh heavily both on Aborigines and on the whites who work alongside them.

We have been concerned here with encounters in principles and planning, but in the meantime other similar encounters occurred at Aputula in the living world of everyday events.

Encounters at the interface: the workplace

In the building and factory programmes and in many other ways Aborigines and whites came into close working association at Aputula. In the examples that follow, we need to recognise the interactional/transactional contrast and in some cases take account of the concepts of authority, teaching or learning. These factors influenced daily working contacts at Aputula both intra- and interculturally.

A preliminary note about local authority and about the conceived standing of projects (and associated work) is useful. They are considered in the reverse order.

Some evidence suggests that Aborigines conceived the housing and factory projects relative to Aputula as 'country' and not as 'place'. While not conclusive, some 'straws in the wind' support the ritual (country) perspective. In the first place, a community meeting was arranged to elect two directors for the factory, the Aputula Construction Company. When nominations were called, Peter, the ritual leader, took charge. He stated that he did not wish to do this work and then, in the presence of the community, authorised two men, Mark and Paul, to take up the directors' jobs. No one questioned his right to do this or the appropriateness of his action. On the contrary, it had obviously been planned because a few moments before the action was taken Paul told me to watch and see what was going to happen. Later he said that what was done was a necessary step. Nevertheless, despite that step, no subsequent meeting took place until Peter was present. Not infrequently a factory vehicle was sent to pick him up. The ritual leader, therefore, was still recognised as the senior man in the company despite what the transactional paper work said.

The nomination of Mark was another straw in the wind. This man, the Southern Aranda leader, was the leader also in practical development. After he died his classificatory brother, a man whose own father preceded Peter as ritual boss, attempted to take the lead in the company, but he was challenged by James, Peter's eldest son. All these men had ritual standing at Aputula. Other features also point to the fact that Aputula was conceived as country. When representatives were called to attend meetings of housing associations and land rights committees in Alice Springs, Peter, the ritual leader, attended. This fact is significant here and the point comes up again later in connection with Aboriginal politics. For other meetings, such as those of Aboriginal Legal Aid, Peter was content that someone else represent the Aputula council. Lastly, when Aborigines elected the committee for the Aputula Housing Association, the first people chosen, including women, were those who regarded Aputula as 'my country' and those who had long and close association with it. Afterwards, the husbands of these women were included also. As in men's ritual, it was they who were actually engaged in the action, in this case in housing and factory work. Since country was the determinant factor, ritual requirements were met and also women's ritual rights.

All the above evidence, underscored by the inclusion of women, supports the view that the projects and associated work were conceived in respect of Aputula as country.

As the above has shown, authority in the work force was exercised by men of the ritually senior patrilines at Aputula. In addition, kinship was also significant. In the first case, relatedness to land and to totem was determinant and in the second, relatedness to people. All of this conforms with an interactional perspective and concept of authority.

Relevant elements depending on kinship were as follows:

- Elder brother (*kuṭa*) had authority over younger brother (*maḷanypa*).[6]
- Mother's brother (*kamuṛu*) had authority over sister's son (*ukaṛi*).
- Father (*mama*) had some authority over son (*katja*), but this was less than that of *kuṭa* and *kamuṛu*.
- Father's father and mother's father (*tjamu*) enjoyed a friendly relationship with son's and daughter's sons (*pakaḷi*).
- In the case of brothers-in-law (*maṛutju*), the situation varied. Some were good friends; but between others at times there was tension, at other times cooperation. Political considerations and drunkenness contributed; so it is not possible to document this with greater precision.

This account is in accord with that of the Warlpiri as Meggitt has described (1962: chaps. 8 & 9).

As experience showed, all these social and cultural elements, grounded in interaction and first degree abstraction, were of importance for Aputula workers. They proved to be more significant than the skills that are accented by whites in a transactional society and culture.

Relationships among workers

In one way or another, interaction was important in each of the following incidents.

Close relatives

At the beginning of the factory work, an Aputula house was to be built at Hermannsburg. A young man, trained to lay the cement floor (the first stage of the building), was put in charge. To give him full responsibility, the supervisor then went away for a week, leaving the young man to choose his working group and to get on with the job. At the end of the time little had been done. It was found that kinsmen senior to him had presented themselves for work and wages, but the young man, unable to refuse them the jobs, likewise lacked authority to tell them what to do. In transactional terms, authority was in the wrong hands: an authority dependent on skills was replaced by one dependent on kinship.

Distant relatives

Too distant relatedness with other workers, that is, having a tenuous basis for interaction, was also the cause of work problems. In this case the foundation for authority was too weak. The example shows a series of interactional and transactional happenings and the consequent clash between western and traditional kin- and land-based priorities. It shows also that if transactional projects are to succeed in traditional society, then it is necessary for whites to recognise and allow for the competing interests.

When Aputula houses were sold, it was hoped that Aboriginal purchasers would put them up. One idea was that, preparatory to building their own houses, men would visit Aputula and receive some training by working with the Aputula men.

The first time this was tried, four Aboriginal men came for training, bringing their wives who were distantly related to some of the Aputula people. Over the weekend, before work commenced, the two senior visitors became drunk and were teased by some local school boys. They were angered by this and later that night trouble flared also between the same men and their wives. Suddenly in the camp these two drunken men made a verbal attack on their wives' relatives. Intermittently for the next half hour they engaged in a bout of swearing, and efforts by their wives and their younger associates failed to stop them. Elsewhere the camp was utterly silent. It was dark so nothing could be seen, but I was told later that here and there men prepared to fight but were restrained. The Aputula ritual leader and his classificatory brother-in-law Sam were urged to take action. Sam was also the mother's brother to the chief offender and therefore had some authority over him. Meantime, the two drunken men, still swearing, armed themselves with knives and approached one of the houses. They said they wished all the Aputula people were dead. At this stage the two older Aputula men, Peter and Sam, responded not with weapons but with words. With great authority and with anger under control, they shouted briefly, each from his own house, a few sentences only, and the swearing stopped. The two younger male visitors rolled their swags, left their companions, and sought a sleeping place in the factory which they used for the remainder of their stay.

Early next day Peter and Sam called a meeting of senior Aputula men and it was decided that the offenders must go. Alternatively, if the white boss did not agree, then they should be refused work for the day. Peter conveyed all this to the boss. Since at that time he did not realise the seriousness of the events and was intent on transactional requirements, such as the work to be done and the training to be given, the white boss did not agree with either proposal. He said that refusal of work was no punishment, a transactional view, and he arranged a marginal concession, putting the offenders to work on their own while the two younger men worked with the Aputula team. Since all the visitors had come to work with the Aputula people and since the less senior of their number were doing so, from the interactional perspective this isolation constituted a minor punishment. Refusal of work would have been better still, and sending them away, thereby arranging a kind of social or interactional 'death', would have been best of all.

That evening Peter had his say. After dark for about half an hour in an otherwise silent camp, he upheld the country of Aputula and himself as a big man. The following day he had the opportunity to go to Ernabella but refused on the grounds that he must look after the *ngura* during the time of the visit. Meantime the white boss, having urgent factory business to attend to in Alice Springs, arranged for me to pay the trouble makers at the end of the week and that they then leave straightaway. The other two could stay for further training. After he left, that same day the Aputula councillors met and made their plans. I was to pay each offender $20 immediately, not full pay but 'enough for the road'; I was to tell them that they would receive the rest of their pay in Alice Springs, and further, that they should not wait till Friday but leave at once by that night's train. At first the greater offender was aggressive, demanding full pay then, but suddenly his demands ceased.

Nothing would persuade the young men to stay so they were paid in full. All the visitors rolled their swags and went immediately to the railway station where they sat for the next ten hours, waiting for the train.

Later, in a number of discussions, Aputula men said they had no hard feelings against the 'quiet ones'. What had happened was that on the night of the trouble they were caught unprepared. After that they fell in with the plans of their white boss, maintaining their relationship with him, and meantime made some preparations. By the time he left, they had the spears ready. They argued further that if in preparation for leaving the men were paid in full, then they might become drunk again and then no one could tell what would happen. Their moves were made to prevent further trouble at Aputula. This they said was not punishment, presumably leaving the door open on that. Clearly, as indicated by their rush to the railway station, the visitors understood.

The Aputula men went on to say that incidents of this kind could finish the Aputula work: that it could spoil the country (*ngura kuraṇi*); that in earlier days all the people might have had to go away for a time; that it could spoil the work (*worka kuraṇi*), but if the offenders went away, things might be all right. When something like this happened, they said, there was no longer any basis for working together because there was no trust (*rapa wiya*) and it was impossible to make friends (*puṭu maḷpaṇi*). They went on to say that if a white boss swears viciously at his Aboriginal worker, that too can 'finish a friend' and can cause an Aborigine to leave his job without saying anything and without waiting for pay. They quoted a recent local example. Lastly, they advanced the suggestion that in future, instead of people coming to Aputula to learn, they be taught in their own place.

The significance of all that had happened was later set out for the white boss who, now understanding, altered the factory arrangements to suit the men's interactional ideas. In short these visitors had been only distantly related. The Pitjantjatjara did not acknowledge relationship at all; they were of a different initiation. The men said, 'You see, you can't work with strangers. You don't know what they will do'.[7] The basis for interactional joint activity was too small and transactional association was culturally unacceptable.

These events show some of the problems that can arise when people whose social processes are all based on interaction attempt a transactional project. It shows also the attempts made by both Aborigines and whites to come to terms with the others' ideas, adaptations that were necessary if the factory was to continue.

Other close relatives

Sometimes men did come to Aputula and were able to join the work force, for instance, young Luritja men who had close kin ties with people at Aputula. Effective interaction was possible making it easier to exercise authority. Some of them had attended the local school. Others came from Fregon and Ernabella, Yangkuntjatjara and Pitjantjatjara men. They were related to men who had married Aputula women and who had already come to live and work in the town. These workers were approved by the council and encouraged by their relatives, but after a time problems could develop with them also. These difficulties were usually politically based or, perhaps, were started through children who came with their parents. These youngsters and the Aputula boys sometimes fought, and the young visitors

were supported by their adult kin. Such fights could turn what appeared to be mere trifles into serious trouble.

One evening, two lads, one about nine years old from Fregon and a twelve year old from Aputula, were having a punch up using boxing gloves. The two were surrounded by a ring of spectators, young men and boys. This contest was not a serious fight, but instead the older lad was defending himself and not using his full strength. Suddenly the small Fregon lad ripped off the over-large gloves and sought a weapon. Seeing this, his brother, a lad about fifteen years old, hurled a few stones at his young brother's Aputula opponent before racing to join in the fight. The thing then started to snowball. One of the spectators, Pete, was mother's brother to the Aputula protagonist and as such was obligated to help him. He quickly pushed the new arrival away saying, 'Don't double bank'. The Fregon teenager thereupon retreated and ran to tell his father of the trouble. This man was the brother of Paul, who was thus classificatory father to the Fregon boys. The two men arrived within moments, very angry and armed with spears. They were looking for Pete because he had laid a hand on their son, a lad almost ready for ritual segregation and the associated initiatory rites. Since Pete's male relatives were some distance away and drunk, he had no one to support him and everyone scattered in the darkness. Paul's wife, Pete's (classificatory) sister, then joined in. She came across to ask me what had happened and on hearing, went back and berated her husband and in-laws. Next day the trouble was not over and Paul, in support of his (classificatory) sons, prepared to burn gramophone records in which the Aputula young people took much pleasure. By accident his plan was discovered and frustrated. This particular family of working visitors did not stay long. The men were not interested in transactional considerations, such as how the trouble started or who had shown aggression first; and all those involved gave support in terms of kinship, that is, on an interactional basis.

In short, in various ways, the basic Aboriginal world view and associated social custom affected the Aputula work force.

Boss-worker relationships

The backstop

We have already identified the interactional problems that confronted an Aboriginal storekeeper, but the same type of difficulty confronted other Aboriginal workers. And again the solution was the same: Aborigines relied on a white person as a kind of backstop.

This practice was adopted, for instance, in the factory. There McNeil was acknowledged boss, although in transactional terms for the first year of its operation another white man held the position of factory manager. As in the store, the relationship set up with the boss made some activities acceptable that without it would have been either impossible or at least more difficult. Men were able to relate to McNeil as boss and, as it were, to activate or use their relationship with him. By focusing on the relationship with McNeil, the men could ignore traditional behaviour among Aboriginal kin. As a result, even a father-in-law and son-in-law, between whom avoidance was customarily mandatory, were able to work in the same team, if not actually side by side.

Relationship to boss was important also in police work. One of the men at Aputula was recovering from an illness when overnight, unexpectedly, he died. He was mother's brother to the man who was then police tracker. According to local Aboriginal custom, because of the close and special relationship between mother's brother and sister's son, the tracker would not have been expected to assist with the body. On the other hand, a tracker was expected to assist the constable in this and other work. In the end, the Aboriginal tracker compromised: he did not help in picking up the body in camp but assisted in taking it from the police Toyota when it arrived back at the station. Next morning in a discussion, the (classificatory) younger brother of the deceased said to him, 'You are the tracker. Don't think about the relation. Do your job'. After that, as usual, the tracker helped the constable with the funeral. In other words, by not thinking about his relative and by focusing attention on his job and on his relationship with his boss, the tracker was able to avoid a conflict with traditional requirements.

Early in the 1980s when Aboriginal health workers had been trained, a skilled health worker took a similar approach by making use of someone who was 'outside' the Aboriginal kinship system. Sometimes a person with whom he had an avoidance relationship required treatment, for instance, his mother-in-law, real or classificatory. When this happened, he left the dispensary and a white nursing sister attended to the patient. Through this cooperation, the Aboriginal was able to be in charge of the clinic and to use his training, yet at the same time to maintain the traditional patterns for interaction.

Delegation of authority

There is another facet also to this boss-worker interaction. Where avoidance relationship was not of a high order and where specific kin-based or ritual authority was a little weak, McNeil found that he could delegate authority. Nevertheless if such delegation was to be recognised, then the action had to be taken in the presence of the workers in the team and, specifically, for the job in hand. Furthermore it was necessary for both Aboriginal and white team leaders. This practice appeared to be in keeping with Peter's action when the directors of the factory were appointed. The custom made it possible for McNeil to get away from Aputula without work stopping. Men appeared to 'use' the relationship with him as boss, whether or not he was there. At the same time, it was necessary to choose an Aboriginal leader with care, and the two who were most successful were men of ritual standing, Mark and James.

Even in the best of circumstances the delegated authority became attenuated or weakened over time unless renewed in some way. Even before the factory was started, at a time when McNeil was away more often than not, Mark's team worked for months almost without supervision. During this time the men concreted floors and dug septic tanks and drains. Sometimes Mark reported to McNeil and received instruction by phone, and I assisted with small organisational details as requested. But Mark was undoubted leader. However, such arrangements were difficult to sustain if McNeil's absence was prolonged. When that occurred, either the delegation of authority or the relationship to the boss became weaker and less effective. Then it required renewing. If this was delayed, efficiency dropped and eventually Aboriginal leaders wanted a rest from work. During

McNeil's presence in Aputula, with a minimum of direction, perhaps a word or two a few times a day, men could and did lead their teams seemingly without difficulty.

This type of behaviour was found also in the store, as noted briefly above. There, without social disruption, Aboriginal people were able to work if I was officially in charge, whether or not I was present. Then Aborigines were able to exercise skills and serve behind the counter, to ask for and receive money in transactional terms. Sometimes with close relatives, say a young sister serving her older brother, I found it helpful to be busy close by. In that case the worker would refer to 'my boss' and apologetically direct her brother's attention to me, and I might even have to attend to that customer. At the same time it was not necessary for me to be there all the time. Refusals could sometimes be made for a few days if I was not present, but that became difficult and impossible to sustain if my absence was prolonged.

Boss and friend

It became clear that for Aborigines 'boss' like 'friend' was an interactional term, and often it was difficult to distinguish between the two concepts. There was no distinction such as that imposed by whites, who use the transactional notion of 'boss' but an interactional concept of 'friend.' Further, since neither white boss nor friend was actual kin to Aborigines, they did not enjoy what might be described as the protection of the kinship system, that is, the limitation on the interaction that is imposed by specific relationship. At the same time, what authority they were accorded by Aborigines, what friendship was offered to them, was strengthened as a result of repeated or continuing interaction. Such activity often occurred outside the work situation. The hour of day or night and the nature and magnitude of a proposed undertaking seemed to be irrelevant to Aborigines. Requests or expectations might include assistance with social service applications, medical and legal help, bailing out, support in courts, requests for money or for fares, for assistance with drunken brawls, and requests for the use of vehicles or the repair or tow of vehicles. There was no logical or legitimised end, so that moderation of interaction was difficult, more particularly since it was the mark of friendship. This has been the common experience of many who have worked closely with Aborigines. As a rule, the closer the association, the more likely the request, and conversely, where such close relationship was not forged, Aborigines were unlikely to make the approach. Again, where a relationship was valued but some uncertainty existed about the outcome, an Aborigine would make his approach through a third party in order to avoid the possibility of a direct refusal. Within the Aboriginal community, if an obligation existed, refusals were impossible or at least very difficult.

In this interactional world, Aboriginal difficulties with a transactional operation were solved by placing a person of non-kin status in a key position in the store or factory. At the same time and by the same move an interactional difficulty arose for the factory boss or for the white storekeeper when the time came for him/her to say 'No' to an Aboriginal friend.

The following simple incident, which is readily understood using the interactional/transactional contrast, emphasises the point. Aboriginal friends visited me one Saturday

evening and next day, some time after the usual Sunday morning store time was over, one of them arrived to ask me to go back and open up again. Since I knew from experience that this would lead to a spate of like requests, I refused. Astonishment then anger showed on his face before he turned and went away, without a word.

On enquiry from another Aborigine I was told that, yes, a friend would not refuse, and while I had acted like a friend last night, I was not doing so this morning. What I had done was like 'finishing a friend'. In other words, I had refused to continue an interaction, breaking up the basis of friendship, and had done so in the presence of many; yet from my transactional perspective, looking to quantifiable elements related to time and work, it was he who had put a strain on friendship.

These things all show that cooperation or activation of an interactional structure in one sphere provides a basis for further expected interaction. There is a kind of flow-on effect. Such things were significant for a storekeeper and for a factory boss.

Relationships with government

Just as Aborigines conceived a process of interaction occurring in their dealings with white friends, so also they saw it in their dealings with government.

One of the men from Ernabella married a woman from Aputula and came to live and work there. This man had many close ties also with people living at Amata (in South Australia, close to the Northern Territory—Western Australia border) and on a visit to his relations held discussions with men and women of his patriline. These Amata people had no contact with the government save as members of a larger community. They agreed that he write to the Director of Aboriginal Affairs as the Aputula council did, in order to seek his assistance in sinking a bore and in building houses out in their country. Having approval from his own ritually senior men, the man came back to Aputula and approached the ritual leader, Peter, to get his agreement. His permission also was necessary and could have been withheld. Receiving permission, he came to me and dictated a letter in Pitjantjatjara, and in the course of stating his case, he made a few points that are relevant here. He described the meeting with his relations and noted that they had considered the work at Aputula and his part in it. He added that he was hoping the Aputula people would help him (presumably by giving permission for the letter). Then he went on:

palu	*ngayulu*	*Aputulala*	*rawa*	*mulapa*	*workaringi*
but	I	Aputula at	continuously	very	was working

munuṇa	*wurli tjuṭa*	*palyaningi*	*munuṇa*	*uwankara*	*floor*
and I	house plural	was making	and I	all	floor

uwankara	*palyaningi*	*munuṇa*	*nyuntula*	*ngatjini*	*ngayunya*
all	was making	and I	you (abl)	ask	me

ngapartji	*halpamilanytjaku*	*munu*	*ngayuku*	*walytja*	*tjuṭa*
ngapartji	to help	and	my	relation	plural

halpamilanytjaku	*munu*	*pukuḷmankunytjaku. . .*
to help	and	to make happy

'I was working for a long time at Aputula and was making many houses and all floors and I ask you *ngapartji* to help me and my relations and to make (us) happy.'

As we have seen the term *ngapartji* involves a two-way notion of interaction or communication. In order to make sure of his meaning, I rocked something back and forth between us and said, 'You mean it is like that between Aputula and the government, and now you want the government to do this', and I changed the direction of the rocking towards his own country. 'Yes', he said, 'like that'.

It is interesting to note that permission was sought from ritual leaders in both places, not from the Aputula company directors, again injecting the ritual element of 'country'. In addition the letter-writer saw his own involvement in the work as important—presumably for helping to forge a link between Aputula and the government, and also for establishing the bridge along which government could start to approach his own people and country. It seems that interaction and not transaction was conceived between government and the Aboriginal community, with Aborigines fulfilling their part by effective work on government-funded projects.

This interactional feature was shown also by Aboriginal responses to the Federal Government's credit squeeze of 1976 (see above). As reported by McNeil, the sudden cessation of funding and the consequent closure of the Aputula work was greatly resented and resulted in a considerable drop in morale. Two Aputula houses were in process of erection in South Australia and some of the men set off, as they said, to help their relations with the work. These men refused unemployment benefits, saying, 'You give things to children, but we are men'. Talking to them about the affair a few weeks later, I noted that they seemed to feel the cut in funds as personal rejection. One added the comment that whites, observing that Aputula Aborigines were becoming knowledgeable, now wished to hold them back. He recalled a visit to Aputula some years earlier (June 1969) by Malcolm Fraser, then Minister for Education but at the time of these events Prime Minister. He spoke of the friendly conversation at that time and of Fraser's interest in what Aborigines had to say, and he expressed the hope that the planned approach to him would be successful now. As noted above, events proved him correct and success resulted in a lift in confidence. Although it is not possible to be certain from this evidence alone, the ingredients are here to support a view that the sudden freezing of funds was interpreted by Aborigines as a refusal by government to continue an interaction already begun, one in which the men at Aputula had fully and knowledgeably played their part. Here was the 'finishing' of friendship and trust. When finance was again made available, the earlier interaction with Mr Fraser was reactivated as was the interaction between Aputula Aborigines and the government itself.

This interpretation is supported by the example of the previous page where the notion of interaction is explicit. Furthermore, there is no reason to suppose that distribution of funds by government is conceived any differently from distribution of goods within Aboriginal society. That, as we have seen, is by a process of interaction.

Concepts and expectations

The preceding pages have shown elements of the Aboriginal-white encounter that occur through work, but we seek now a deeper understanding. What we attempt is to throw light on the significance of work for Aborigines and on what a working relationship with whites means to them. This section takes up a point just made: that funding and related work sets up a process of interaction. It draws also on Aboriginal conceptualisation of knowledge, learning and authority, concepts that have been exemplified already and with which we are, therefore, familiar. Relevant points significant for our discussion are:

- People learn by doing, by having the experience, and this results in becoming knowledgeable;
- Knowledge confers authority, although this is subject also to other factors such as kinship and ritual standing;
- Opportunities to do and to have experiences become available through invitation to join in some activity.

In other words, although it is not the only factor, interaction by invitation leads first to learning, knowledge and authority, all of them first order abstractions and second, as we shall see, it leads to equality with whites.

The six examples below show Aborigines using all these ideas when referring to work itself. We, therefore, use them the more confidently in determining the significance of work for Aboriginal people. Because elucidation depends on the whole group of incidents, all are set down before analysis is attempted. The possibility for loss of communication between Aborigines and whites becomes clear.

Example 1

The first illustration is taken from the example just given. It shows Aboriginal interpretation of the freezing, and subsequent release, of government funds. Of particular interest is the reference to knowledge ('Aputula Aborigines were becoming knowledgeable. . .') and to the child-like status of the person who receives money in the form of social security benefits. This situation compares adversely with the status of a man in receipt of money for work.

Example 2

One day a slab of concrete was being laid and the white foreman, knowing that the men were familiar with the procedure, went away and left them to it. The slab was large and despite hard work by the men, it was not finished before the midday break. At the same time the cement could not be left to dry out as it was. The foreman came back to see how the job was progressing and found it unfinished. He pointed out to the workers that the cement was too high in one corner, and then, since it was lunch time, took over the job to let them get away to eat. They were not only furious but embarrassed/shy/ashamed (*kuṇtaringanyi*).

For the next two hours, over and over again, they made two points. First, they knew how to do the job; they were doing it; they had laid a slab successfully the day before and another the day before that; the white knew this but had treated them as if they were ignorant. Second, white people always take over; they never let Aborigines finish a job; they don't want Aborigines to work; always they make themselves the boss; they seize authority. The whole team decided to leave the job. The Aboriginal man in charge of the team said later that he had not wanted to stop for lunch, but wanted to finish the work. Had the white explained that he was only helping because it was dinner time, then that would have been all right. Instead he growled at them, pointing out something they knew, and then took over.

Example 3

As we have seen, the men who worked in the store collected and paid for goods at the railway station and banked the money. After they had been doing this for some time, I was away for two years and during that time a white man ran the store for the Aboriginal people. On my return I found that although he had been making considerable attempts to keep the council and other Aborigines informed (verbally), many men told me that they had lost touch with what was happening. They said this man made himself the boss and that the council was weak. Councillors attributed the weakness to lack of knowledge of what was happening. They noted, for instance. that now the store banking and payments at the railway were undertaken by the temporary storekeeper. All they did was to sign cheques, but they did not know what they were for. Apart from the fact that information may not have been understood, the reasons given related to a reduction in their active participation in store affairs and, thus, to a reduction in the responsibility that they accepted. Knowledge-about remained; practice did not.

Example 4

In a letter to the Director of Aboriginal Affairs, written by the council to support their request for a factory, the men wrote (in part):

Nganaṇa	*workaku*	*mukuringanyi*	*ngurpa*	*nyinanytjakutawara*	
We	work (gen)	want	ignorant	to sit	lest

piṛanta	*lipularinytjikitja,*	*kaya*	*piṛanpa*	*tjuṭa*
white	level to be	and they	white	plural

katuringanyi	*nintiringkula*	*worka*	*tjuṭa*
go-up	having become knowledgeable	work	plural

palyaṛa	*ka*	*nganaṇa*	*tjaṛuringanyi*
having done	and	we	go-down

'We want to work, lest we remain ignorant, and to be level with whites. Whites go up because they have learned, having done a lot of work, and we go down.'

Example 5

Later, after the factory was in operation, a directive was sent to all Aboriginal housing associations from the DAA Darwin office forbidding housing associations from purchasing demountable houses. This action removed the Aputula market at one stroke of the pen. At that time the Aputula council sent a letter to the Director of the Department in Canberra. In part they wrote:

kala	*ngura*	*nyangangka*	*Aputulala*	*puḷkaṛa*	*workaripai*
and we	place	in this	at Aputula	greatly	able to work

piṛanpa	*wiya*
white	no

'In this place, at Aputula, we are great workers without white supervision.'

Further on in the same letter the point was reiterated:

palu	*nganaṇa*	*mulapa*	*piṛanpa*	*wiya*	*workaripai*
but	we	truly	white	no	able to work

John	*McNeiltu*	*nintinyangka*
John	McNeil	having taught

'Truly we are able to work without a white because John McNeil taught (us).'

They went on to describe the practical aspects of putting up a house.

Example 6

A case of serious swearing is described earlier in this chapter. The event occurred when Aboriginal men whose wives were distant relatives of some Aputula people came for training in house building. After the swearing incident described above, the Aputula Council sent a letter to the offenders' own home council. In it they said that, initially, Peter and Mark agreed for the trainee workers' visit because they 'will work to learn' (*workariku nintiringkunytjikitja*).

Discussion

Using the ideas already established and drawing selectively, first on one example, then on another, we can arrive at some understanding of the Aboriginal view of work and its importance to Aborigines at Aputula. The association between working and learning is explicit. Both Aborigines and whites learn by working (examples 4 and 6) and opportunities for this were opened up through government-funded projects. Work on these projects was not mere practice, for men performed actual work and by this experience they learned,

gaining knowledge and authority. These projects were important for another reason. Through them, by the distribution, receipt and use of goods, an interaction was set up between Aborigines and the funding agency. Further, Aborigines said they wanted to work so that they could enjoy equality with whites (example 4).

Sometimes Aborigines were prevented from working. This restriction occurred when whites stopped interacting with Aborigines by withholding funds for the third year of the building programme (example 1). Instead, Aborigines were offered social security benefits, money without work, a mere hand-out, depriving them of the opportunity to respond as men and treating them as if they were children (example 1).

On other occasions Aborigines were unable to work because white people took their jobs. A white man sometimes did this without discussion, making himself the boss (examples 2 and 3). As a result, Aborigines became ignorant and weak, losing authority (example 3). This last example brings out Aboriginal ideas particularly well. Although they had verbal information, councillors said that they no longer banked the store money and this lack of active involvement contributed to council's weakness and ignorance. Since during the same period these men were banking their own money, the statement was specific. It did not refer to ignorance of banking as such but, instead, to the concrete action of banking the store's money. Failure to do this resulted in loss of authority.

As well as having these effects, the events described were significant in another way also. By taking the action that they did, whites advanced themselves relative to Aborigines. While the former 'went up', the latter 'went down'. Aputula Aborigines had tried to avoid this kind of thing when they asked for funds for the factory. Through such a project they could continue working, maintaining equality with whites (example 4).

The examples show also that in the Aboriginal view whites intended to denigrate Aborigines. Seeing them becoming knowledgeable, whites wanted to hold them back (example 1) or, again, when they knew that Aborigines had the knowledge for the job in hand, they did not want them to work (example 2). Notwithstanding, Aborigines at Aputula were capable of working without supervision (example 5). There was no suggestion from Aborigines that they wanted to dominate. Instead, they write about being 'level' with whites (example 4). Perhaps equality is a necessary feature of interaction in the work place with each partner in the process playing their own and necessary part.

In all of this discussion, different conceptualisation results in different interpretation of what is happening, in alternative ideas of work and working relationships and of funding. While whites as well as Aborigines sometimes lack work opportunities and suffer from the consequences of ignorance, the point to note here is that when one party uses abstractions of the second order and the other uses first order abstractions, an additional dimension is added to problems of communication. Under these circumstances, as in the examples given, an administrator's action when cutting up a too small financial cake or a foreman's attention to time can be interpreted, and interpreted logically, as attempts to demote Aborigines, to usurp authority and to deny equality.

Encounters at the interface: politics

Kinship and politics

Writing of the principles of interaction (chap. 8), we noted that Aboriginal behaviour is determined by kinship: that kin relatedness is put into action through a process of interaction. While that is so, under this general umbrella a number of factors influence practice in secular contexts, that is, not the process as such but its avenue of use.

One factor is the distance of relationship. When individuals are closely related, formal kin obligations have considerable strength, and the person admired is the one who observes these obligations. By contrast, in day-to-day affairs interaction between more distantly related kin is less binding. Distant classificatory kin, therefore, have some choice in deciding whether or not to take up their relationship, whether or not to put their relatedness into practice. Choice here refers not to socially enjoined content but to whether or not interaction occurs at all. For instance, a man has some freedom of decision about whether to pursue interaction with a 'far away' classificatory brother but the same is not so with siblings. This opportunity of choice opens the way to political action.

In a related feature, when a distant classificatory relationship is acted upon, the resultant interaction strengthens the bond between the parties and provides a stronger base for further interaction, as we saw above.[8] In any particular event, therefore, for those who are distantly related actual practice depends in part on the current state of interaction between them. If it is in good order through use, more interaction is expected and can be exploited politically.

Another practical element is noted by Berndt. Writing about situations of conflict, he points out that on any particular occasion everyone taking part is related in one way or another to all the others. Multiple loyalties result so that what people do is to some degree a matter of choice and can introduce political elements (Berndt 1965:172). In other words, people enjoy some freedom and can choose which of two or more relationships to draw on in interaction. This observation is linked to distance of relationship, for the greater this distance is, the greater the number of alternatives from which to choose. Such things have been foreshadowed by the observation that men united in one ritual are yet divided in another, say by moiety or local clan. In other words, between distant kin the individual has some freedom over which aspect of kinship he will take up in secular life, a freedom that introduces the possibility of political manoeuvre. At the same time, although close kin have no real choice, this lack of choice can also be a political advantage, for a family is a powerful combination; members can rely on support.

Land and politics

If distance of relationship between kin affects secular behaviour, so also does distance of relationship to land. This topic raises questions of ritual authority and its influence in day-to-day activity.

Meggit has taken the view that secular authority is exercised through kinship alone

(Meggit 1962:242 ff.) but Berndt does not agree. Instead, he holds with Elkin that Aboriginal elders, in virtue of their ritual authority, wield power also in secular contexts (Berndt 1965:174-5; 202-5). Strehlow, also writing of Western Desert Aborigines and of Aranda, takes a similar stance. He stresses that ritual and secular authority are closely related and further that both are linked to territory (Strehlow 1970:108-10).

We can expect, therefore, that ritual elements associated with land will be instrumental in helping to determine what interactions will occur. There are two significant factors: an individual's association with a ritually senior local group and his/her rights connected with birth or conception (for instance, for Pitjantjatjara the place of birth, but for Aranda the place of mother's quickening). Since a person has a right to be in his/her own country, either of these features provides a powerful base on which to rely. To send such a person away as a disciplinary measure is difficult, although a traditional sanction, but those individuals whose link with the place in question is more tenuous are more easily physically displaced.

As we have seen, relationship with land derives from Aboriginal belief in child-spirits or a trail of life, associated with totemic ancestors. Such an association of specific individual and specific totem site, based on belief in vital, spiritual entities, is in keeping with interactional concepts but not with transactional ones.

Politics at Aputula

The community at Aputula was small, but all of these interrelated factors could be identified there. All are interactional in type, all based on relationship to specific people or on relationship to land, and all had a bearing on which interactions were expected and which were put into practice. Most had import for the Aboriginal-white contact but also for Aboriginal society in the context of that contact. In summary, these elements were:

- the extent or degree of current interaction—a flow-on effect;
- the distance of classificatory relationship (near or far) and the possibility of choice;
- the totality of interlocking relationships, opening the way to choice;
- seniority, depending on ritual standing in particular country.

All of these factors plus the concept of authority, a first degree abstraction, were important for politics at Aputula.

The first two factors require some empirical support. The flow-on effect will be shown by three examples, the first two of which, while showing the principles, do not occur in the context of Aboriginal-white contact. The first example is unusual in that it shows a strong-willed sister refusing to give her brothers money. But there were consequences.

The male members of a family were all heavy drinkers. One sister received money from her husband and a younger unmarried sister was in paid employment. Both young women were opposed to drinking but were asked by their older brothers to supply money for the purchase of wine. The older of the two sisters refused, but the younger complied. In drunken fighting within the family, whether her money was involved or not, the younger sister was sometimes able to 'settle them (the combatants) down' but the older sister was unable to do so. After one such occasion the young woman volunteered the information

that her effectiveness arose from compliance with the men's requests.

A similar effect can be shown from the store work. It will be recalled from the account of the Aputula store given above that Thomas, the store worker, continued to hand out food and was able to exert a measure of control on fighting. Paul, on the other hand, who attempted to collect payment in the store, lost some of his earlier authority. As in the instance given above, by exercise of interaction and through the use of things, an operational base was provided for interaction of a different kind, namely for the exercise and acceptance of authority. Thomas forged an effective interaction from which further interaction flowed, but Paul did not.

The same principle applied in interactions with whites. The following event shows, in effect, the use of an interactional 'No' and 'Yes'. One day an Aboriginal man refused to pay me a store account that he knew was due. Later on, during the evening, I was able to assist him in the collection of firewood, whereupon he suddenly produced the money and was unconcerned that I did not then have any change with me. This incident was not transactional exchange but an interaction, putting our relationship into practice by distributing concrete items, firewood and money, the first interaction leading on to the second.

Distance of relationship is the next factor to illustrate. We will note in particular the effect of remoteness although close relationship is shown also.

At Aputula some men of the less senior patrilines lived in wife's country and thus in the presence of a distant classificatory father. In the course of time these men could and did buy vehicles and were able to keep them for their own use, that is, they did not make them available to their distant (classificatory) father. The same men, when visiting close kin, actual father and grandfather and their brothers, did not have control over the vehicles except that they seemed to have the right to drive back to their employment (stressing perhaps their relationship with the boss). If their cars became unserviceable during the visit, then they might be able to borrow from one of their relatives, but getting back was sometimes very difficult.

The same thing was shown again in a case involving young, uninitiated men living and working at Aputula. These late teenagers were in the presence of senior men of their own patriline. Sometimes they bought items such as radios and tape recorders, but these things often passed permanently to senior kin, usually actual father or older brother. Two of these young men were saving up to buy their own cars but decided that the exercise was not worthwhile. As one of them said, they would not be able to keep them. The older initiated men had the same wages as the younger but spent their pay drinking at the hotel. At the same time the pay of the young men was available to them, or the items that they bought, through obligatory patterns of social interaction. The young men, therefore, withdrew their money from the bank and spent it on liquor.

Yet again, an Aputula woman inherited money when her father died, and it was used to buy a second-hand 4-wheel drive Toyota.[9] Not long afterwards a close relative of her husband came to work at Aputula. After some months this young man went to live in his wife's country and, without a word to his Aputula kin, took the Toyota with him. Among this wife's relatives it provided a power base, and since he did not return to Aputula, it was never recovered. This action was resented for it was the first vehicle the family had owned

and the best in the community, but the point is that it could be removed by a close relative.

These incidents support the view that there were some politically useful freedoms that could be exercised when living in the presence of distant classificatory kin, including the ability to refrain from interaction and thus to retain material things. This freedom was lost in contact with close kin, such as senior persons of one's own patriline. On the other hand, disadvantages also accrued when living in wife's country, that is, in areas in which affines had local ritual seniority. In this case a man might be able to keep his car, but in other respects he was dominated by the locally senior group, as further examples will show in due course.

In the traditional setting individuals used these factors and the others listed above to gain political advantage, and they continued to do so in the context of the Aboriginal-white encounter. What happened was that whites themselves and the new roles and material goods they introduced were influential in the Aboriginal political scene, providing, or potentially providing, a non-traditional source of authority and power. Aborigines exploited this alien power base in their dealings with other Aborigines according to traditional norms.

Two points must be made. First, in the examples given below, all taken from the living situation of Aboriginal-white contact, it is often difficult to determine where the legitimate expectations of genuine friendship end and where politics begin. While uncertainty exists, what is reasonable expectation and what is political manoeuvre is a matter properly left open. This is because it may be fairly clear at both ends of the spectrum, but there is a large grey area in the middle. Again, something done in friendship today becomes tomorrow's political base. In addition any attempt to attribute motive is fraught with difficulty. It is preferable, therefore, to see how the system works rather than to pass judgment.

Second, the events described below in which Aborigines take part resemble events in which whites alone are actors. In certain respects, however, the resemblance may be no more than superficial. Difference is shown when Aborigines and whites work together and have different expectations of the same event because they conceptualise the action differently.

Interactional politics: use of goods and equipment

Conceptual context

As we have seen, relationship is expressed in Aboriginal society through a process of interaction, by the distribution of goods and by services rendered. By extrapolation, therefore, we can posit that Aborigines expect that the same process is in operation when goods are received from whites; that they think some kind of relatedness is being expressed and expect whites to see it that way too. This use of interactional thought was raised above in regard to goods received from the government, and it is supported by evidence from other fields, for instance, Aboriginal expectations of friends and bosses through the assimilation of those relationships to interactional ideas. Such a notion is important in the context of Aboriginal politics, particularly when seen in the light of the first of the factors

noted above, that is, the flow-on effect expected from current, functioning interaction.

Given these things, it is not difficult to see that through a conceived process of interaction whites could appear as a permanent source of goods, power and authority for the individual Aborigine. The entrepreneur would obtain goods through interaction with whites which would provide him not only with a personal source of material things but also, through distributing part of the flow to others, provide him with a strong interactional base with them. From both sets of interactions he could expect more to follow, resulting on the one hand in continuance of supply and, on the other, support from the community.

In short, through an interactional process he would have access to power and authority. In effect, he would be able to establish a base rivalling that of local men whose traditional authority rested on myth, ritual and land—a base that through increase ceremonies was the source of material prosperity. The idea is in keeping with a comment of Strehlow's, that the status of a ceremonial leader was in some ways similar to that of the managing director in a vitally necessary food-producing company (Strehlow 1970:111).

This account sets out the process by which access to and distribution of material goods was a force in interactional politics.

Use of money and goods

Two sources of money and goods at Aputula were the store and the $5000 government grant. As noted, I had been asked to work in the store and by saying 'No' to ensure its survival. As two of the three trustees, Paul and I were involved also in administering the government grant. From an interactional perspective, this money would have come from the government by an interaction with the trustees who, by the same process, would hand the funds on to members of the community. Through my work in the store and through handling the grant, I was able to observe differing expectations of Aborigines and whites. These observations helped to highlight Aboriginal political aspiration, not because it was brought to fruition but because for transactional reasons it was frustrated. This result was shown through a number of incidents in which Paul and I were involved.

First, as reported above, when the $5000 grant was received, councillors at once said that a Land Rover should be bought. As trustee I vetoed that suggestion on transactional, administrative grounds, for the men had been asking for help with other projects. I suggested that if they wanted a Land Rover they should ask for one and in the meantime use the money in terms of their earlier request. This suggestion was in accord with the covering letter that accompanied the grant. I asked further whether or not they wanted to get more money from the government. If so, it would be wise to adhere to their own proposals, now financed, and not to change their plan once money arrived. My suggestion was accepted in practice, but was not accepted in the sense of concurrence, at least not by Paul. This was one disagreement over the handling of the grant. Another arose, as described, over paying the post cutters, an action from which Paul dissociated himself.

Next, towards the end of November 1970 meetings of the community were called by Thomas and Paul to discuss the parlous state of store finances. The day following one meeting, having urged everyone to pay cash lest the store be 'finished' and having cash in

hand himself, Paul approached me wanting to take a much larger quantity of goods than usual on extended credit. This idea was associated with a planned visit to Alice Springs. He, his wife, his classificatory daughter and other members of the community were to attend a specialist clinic at the hospital. I was to drive the party up, but they were to return by train with railway passes provided by the health department. After staying a few days, I planned to return with a load for the store, thus saving freight. Paul, for his part, planned that he would wait the extra time in Alice Springs, foregoing pay in the interim (thereby reducing his ability to pay any tick), and that he along with the other two members of his family would come back with me. For transactional reasons I refused to agree to the credit and pointed out that with the load, I would have no room for passengers who, in any case, could return home by train without expense to themselves. Paul was angry although he said little at the time.

Again, soon after this trip was completed, I took a party out to search for australites to sell. With the group was Thomas's wife and daughter but no one from Paul's household. Unlike the others they had not shown interest in going, but it is true that I had not specifically invited them.

Lastly, from the time of my arrival in Aputula, Paul and his family had been good friends of mine. I often leaned heavily on him for information, advice and practical help, and was able to assist him in return mainly through my ownership of the Land Rover. This assistance made many hunting trips and other outings possible. Furthermore, I was sent to Aputula by the church and he was church leader there.

This review gives the background for what follows—basically a friendship between Paul, his family and me. This friendly association was often expressed by doing things together, but now I was refusing to fit in with some of Paul's plans. The confrontation that I describe arose because I did not further activate the functional interactional bond already forged, on which he based his expectations of me.

One day soon after the events just described, arriving suddenly at my caravan, Paul angrily rejected much of the positive work (as I thought) that was going forward. Significantly, he attacked two things, both involving money (which at Aputula was a medium of interaction). First, he accused me of helping Thomas only, who, said Paul, would get a lot of government money. The store, he added, is finished; the council is finished, everything. Other people will get plenty, but he had received nothing from government money (presumably the $5000).[10] He spoke of his wife who, he said, was alone. Furthermore they wanted a car to go for holidays and to see many friends. He would get help and money from somewhere else. More in like vein followed. Furiously, he took off his councillor's badge and gave it to me. Later in the day, the council refused to meet with him and they kept Paul's badge for three weeks before returning it. He was, in fact, cut off from decision making.

After a two-year absence from Aputula on my part, the subject came up again. Just before he left, the interim storekeeper volunteered the information that Paul was still angry because I had refused to use the $5 000 grant for the purchase of a Land Rover, presumably the vehicle he wanted for holidays. But it was not until a further year had passed and other events occurred that I could assess the trouble adequately. The opportunity came during a discussion with Thomas of the swearing problem, recounted above. He spoke of the lack

of relationship, lack of trust and the lack of a basis on which to work together. I enquired then if the old trouble with Paul was something like it. 'Same again', said Thomas, adding, 'No trust, friend ended/made to finish' (*rapa wiya, malpa wiya wiyani*).

As this summary makes clear, in Paul's eyes I had not acknowledged or acted in terms of the kind of relationship that he thought existed between us and had not used the interactional process that he thought we both accepted. In other words, from his perspective, there was currently active interactional relationship between us, as quasi-kin, but I refused to use material goods to express it. As a result, the basis for united work and mutual cooperation had gone. Paul rejected, therefore, everything that we had been involved in together, in particular the two sources of money, the store and the council (receivers of the grant), stating explicitly that he had expected money or goods from both of them.

The contrast here between interactional and transactional process, between partiality and impartiality, between specificity and generalisation (that is, between first and second order abstraction) explains the trouble between Paul and me personally but draws attention also to the adverse effect on Paul within Aboriginal society. In two ways my transactional intervention interrupted the course of Paul's interactions, making it impossible for him to take any material or political advantage. I prevented him from benefiting from interaction with government by stopping him from getting a car and prevented him also from handing out what to me was too much money to the post cutters. Both the distribution of cash and the car would have provided him with a power base and the ground for continuing an advantageous interaction with other members of the Aboriginal community.

No doubt superficially the facts can be interpreted in transactional terms alone, but while that could account for Paul's anger, it sits uneasily on his total catalogue of events. Similarly, transaction does not fit Thomas's explanation of Paul's explosion; that provides an interactional reason for the anger, although it neither approves nor condemns that anger.

Use of equipment

Equipment received for work projects was held by Aborigines to be rightly available for individual use, specifically, for those who used it themselves during work hours. By applying an interactional model we see that material goods were not conceived solely in respect of the work for which they were intended.[11] Superficially, this notion is not peculiar to Aborigines; whites not infrequently take assets from work for private use, but the whites know that someone has to pay, and they are prepared to let it happen. At Aputula Paul attempted to monopolise the vehicle supplied by the church for community use and, after I no longer had any responsibility in the matter, was largely successful. Mark insisted that the tractor he drove during work hours should be available to him (as a motor vehicle) at weekends, and James wanted the new $60 000 truck for a similar purpose. Since McNeil was in Alice Springs at the time and the only boss James acknowledged, it was necessary to take the vehicle to town so that it could be under McNeil's direct control. It is significant that the three men mentioned here, Mark, James and Paul, were all leaders in one way or another, all working closely with particular whites and each wanting private access to items related to that work association. These men as leaders took greater responsibility than other Aborigines and in transactional terms were in positions of trust. At the same time,

presumably, they saw their work with McNeil and with me as a process of interaction in which they played a responsible part. It was they, therefore, who had expectations such as the ones noted and who were furious when either of us used the transactional 'No'. Other Aborigines who did not have such a close and continuous working association rarely, if ever, made 'requests' of such magnitude.

As presented here, this type of action does not constitute an attempted political manipulation of white friends by Aborigines, although it has political import within Aboriginal society, but it is the result of legitimate expectation arising from conceived interaction. Nonetheless misunderstanding results from different ideas about what is happening, the transactional process conflicting with the interactional. Inevitably, whites and Aborigines are placed in a situation of conflict in virtue of the working association and the friendship between them. Notwithstanding, white transactional behaviour does not always work to the disadvantage of Aboriginal friends.

Interactional politics: social control

The Aboriginal-white encounter had an effect also on social control in Aboriginal society; thus in this further respect that encounter was of political significance for Aborigines.

Social context

Four elements of significance for social control in traditional Aboriginal society, all of which were still observed at Aputula, are the support given to kin; the use of physical force; the right of the individual to be in country in which he/she is ritually senior; and the punishment of offenders by sending them away.

In earlier years when Aborigines were nomadic, the various groups each enjoyed their time of local seniority, possibly itself a factor in social control, but this rotation was greatly reduced after white settlement. Following that, most Aborigines abandoned, or were forced to abandon, the traditional lifestyle and became established near places where whites were living. Where this happened, Aboriginal people of local seniority gained permanent advantage. It is perhaps significant, as we have noted, that when asked what good things Aborigines had learned from whites, the Aputula ritual leader said, 'To stay in one place'. In addition to teaching this 'lesson', whites imposed their own law, which made assault, particularly assault with weapons, a punishable offence. While weapons were often still used at Aputula, it was illegal, but the sanction of sending away was still permitted under white law and was effective with people of lower ritual standing. If the trouble maker was a person of ritual seniority, control was more difficult, for he/she had a right to be in that country. Moreover, members of the senior patriline were numerous and supported each other without fail. At other times the white presence made it difficult to exercise sanctions within a family where kin-based, rather than land-based, authority played a bigger role. For traditional reasons, therefore, it was sometimes difficult to control an offender. When this happened, Aborigines called on western authority and so sought

help from whites. This action avoided a direct, non-traditional confrontation between Aborigines so that each individual was able to retain his social identity and, in the wider sacred, totemic context, an identity within the universe itself.

Traditional sanctions and obligations

One woman, when drunk, caused considerable trouble between husbands and wives and she was repeatedly knocked about by the women. After a long period of trouble, the policeman locked her in a cell overnight, but on release in the morning she was drunk again almost immediately and within half an hour was once again in hot water. Seizing a brand from the fire, her classificatory mother's brother chased her through the Aboriginal housing area. Catching up he threatened her with the brand but did not hit her because, as he said afterwards, she was so frightened. Meantime the whole community was watching, each person from wherever they happened to be, and each without any movement at all. The woman started to cry and, sobering up at once, went from group to group. Still no one moved, not a sign of recognition, not a word, no response at all. Socially she was dead or, in a sense, did not exist. Greatly distressed she came and stood beside me. Finding that a white man was going through Kulgera that day and was willing to take her, the community decided to send her with him. The woman was sent to sit by my caravan and there she stayed all morning, afraid to move about and alone, save for her dog that someone rounded up and left with her. She was watched closely, if unobtrusively, and by early afternoon was on her way. While all this was happening, the woman's husband was out hunting. On return, finding her gone, he was furious, engaged in a little shouting, then quietened down and took the first opportunity to follow his wife. As he said, if anything happened to her, he would be held responsible by her kin. Possibly the Aputula community blamed him in part for the disruption she caused; certainly he was not consulted about what might be done. Women said that in the old days, she would have been beaten severely and sent away, but nowadays, under white law, this beating was impossible so another means of expelling her had to be found. Led by the woman's kinsman, a man who had authority over her and who carried some responsibility for her, the community took traditional action but called in a white man to assist in enforcing the punishment.

As already described, sometimes relatives arrived for a visit but outstayed their welcome—that is, economically, kin were unable to support them. While obligation was counted on, acknowledged and honoured for a few weeks, eventually the help of the police constable might be sought to send them away, a task that was too difficult between relatives. In this way, through a friendly approach to white police (interaction) followed by police action against the cause of the problem, a direct confrontation was avoided between kin, a traditional right circumvented, and a personal goal achieved. On one occasion expulsion of a troublesome visitor was doubly difficult because the man in question had been born close by and, therefore, had a right to be in the country (although in practice he was seldom at Aputula).

Drunkenness could also cause problems, and sometimes people who wanted nothing more than to get to sleep became embroiled. On such occasions, as we have seen, members

of less senior patrilines might ask the constable for help, and as a result, offenders of ritually senior families could be locked up overnight, terminating the fighting. In this way, without a direct confrontation within Aboriginal society, those of lesser local authority were able to exert pressure that traditionally would have been difficult, gaining a measure of control over some members of a large and ritually senior group. But in the morning, after the trouble was over, Aborigines held that it would only prolong the trouble if the victim laid a charge against the aggressor. People did not do so.

Traditional rights

In another case, locality, the site of birth, was significant. In this instance workers chose to give priority to their relationship with the factory manager and were able therefore to take action to control a member of the community. One woman who was born about six kilometres from Aputula was a heavy drinker, as also was her husband. They often fought each other and other people were drawn into the altercation. These fights between the couple were often violent, with the two racing about over the greater part of the housing area. No one could sleep. On this particular occasion the trouble had been continuous for weeks and eventually the disruption was such that men's work attendance was adversely affected. At this stage the factory manager told the workers that if they did not come to work then he could not pay them. He pointed out that they were allowing the couple to control affairs. Almost at once the men called a community meeting, and it was decided to send the pair away for a time. Nevertheless, despite the prolonged nuisance, nothing was done to control the couple until the factory manager expressed dissatisfaction. From the interactional perspective, the pair's activities had begun to strain the relationship between the workers and their boss, shown also by reduction in wages. This state of affairs seemingly provided a sufficient basis for action. Aborigines decided to stress their interaction with the white man giving this priority over other considerations. While action was sometimes taken against others for similar offences, it may be that nothing was done earlier in this case because it was the woman's right, stemming from her place of birth, to be at Aputula, and her husband also had many close relatives there.

Summary

In summary, whites were often called in to assist Aborigines in matters of social control, either to assist in enforcing the traditional or to assist in avoiding it. Examples of the second type show that by stressing interaction with a white person, for instance the police constable or the factory boss, Aborigines were able to bypass traditional rights and obligations and authority, all based either in kinship or relationship to land, but to do it in such a way that direct confrontation was avoided between Aborigines. As a result, the traditional pattern of social interaction was retained. The method used, the activation of an

alternative interaction, was traditional, but the involvement of a white in the interaction was new, opening up new political opportunities within Aboriginal society. Nonetheless, by their presence and their laws whites have been the cause of some of the difficulties.

Interactional politics: authority

Context

In the course of promoting self management and community development, whites began to encourage Aborigines to take up transactional roles and to develop skills derived from white society. Whereas previously Aborigines worked under the direction and authority of Westerners, from the early 1970s onwards they were increasingly encouraged to take leadership positions in a range of activities appropriate to western society and culture and to develop a whole range of associated skills. With this policy, whites introduced also a concept of authority different from the Aboriginal authority based on kinship, land and ritual factors, replacing a concrete interactional notion with a more abstract transactional one. In other words, they introduced a non-traditional base for power.

Aborigines in transactional jobs

Some Aborigines at Aputula held transactional jobs but, as we have seen, avoided an interactional-transactional conflict. They did this by cooperating with a person who was not associated with the Aboriginal system of kinship and of ritual belief. This individual, or backstop as he (or she) has been referred to, was sometimes a white boss (as happened in the store, in the factory and in the police force), but the white was not necessarily in a senior position. In the clinic the Aboriginal person was in charge.

Nevertheless, despite the measures taken with reliance on a white person, transactional positions were a threat to traditional authority. Potentially, those who held such jobs were in a position of political advantage, the more so as they became involved in westernised community development programmes in which whites expected them to exercise transactional authority.

On the other hand, politically constraining factors were present also. At Aputula, and widely in central and north Australia, communities and councils appointed people of lesser ritual standing to transactional jobs (lesser standing, that is, in the place of their appointment).[12] As a result, if they so wished, men of the locally ritually senior patrilines could discipline them. In the meantime it suited the ritual leaders, who already carried considerable responsibility in caring for the land, to let others carry these new responsibilities and to be held responsible in concrete terms if anything went wrong. This practice was a factor in two further transactional jobs at Aputula. These jobs were at the disposal of the council and both were given to a man of lesser patriline.

The council owned a small truck and they appointed a middle-aged man to drive it. No objection was raised to a certain amount of private use, but then he began to treat the

vehicle as his own and went to Alice Springs. This trip was taken on a weekend when older senior men of the council wanted to be driven out to a site about 160 kilometres from Aputula. On his return the traveller was dismissed at a council meeting and, being a man of lesser local authority and without white backing, he was sent away for a month.

On another occasion this same man was chosen to be hygiene officer. Part of his job was to remove rubbish and to collect firewood, and in the course of these duties, he drove the community Land Rover. In some respects he performed this work satisfactorily, but while saying that he was looking after the vehicle for the community, he totally monopolised it for personal use. In another respect also he did not take a transactional stance, but the situation came about for reasons that were not altogether of his making. It occurred because some members of the community, including the ritual leader, refused to ask him to collect wood for them. Since he did not do it spontaneously, in winter they were often without supplies. Seemingly, instead of seeing him as an employee and asking from that perspective, they made no request (and no delivery was made), due to traditional patterns of social interaction.

In short, difficulties arose for people of traditional society and culture when they appointed a community member to a transactional western type job. Both employee and employers continued to act in terms of the rights and obligations of kinship: the hygiene officer carried out his work for those who were appropriately related to him, but for them only. Those who were not so related refrained from asking him for assistance. Interactional and transactional practice contrasted so that only part of the community was served.

The role of representative

Another role derived from transactional white society was that of representative. In this case, beyond having the right to choose a representative, the possibility of community control could be minimal or lacking altogether. Not infrequently government bodies or other agencies required Aboriginal communities to send representatives to meetings. Usually they were asked to send two persons and they were to speak for the whole community. As we have seen, for the traditional Aputula Aborigines authority was interactional; it depended on relationship both to people and to land and was specific with reference to them, as also to myth and ritual. This relationship was concrete in character and non-transferable, as also was authority. In addition, authority was acquired through actual experience, not through formal knowledge about something. For both of these reasons, the idea of investing someone with authority to speak for country other than his or her own was alien. In effect, by requiring Aborigines to undertake such a thing, whites implied that a person could be invested with a whole set of relationships to land, to associated totems and to people that manifestly the individual did not have. Such a formal transactional notion was not merely culturally and cosmically unacceptable, but the idea of representation was concretely impossible, not tied directly to reality and so a second order abstract concept.

The notion of a representative contrasts with the delegation of authority undertaken by Peter when he made two men directors of the factory. On that occasion Peter did not

abdicate but retained his senior status in land and factory and, as shown, attended directors' meetings. Here the directors accorded him authority, although he had no standing from the western point of view.[13] At Aputula the idea of speaking for someone who was ritually senior or for country other than one's own or for patrilines other than one's own was in conflict with the people's conceptual world. Accordingly, when 'representatives' went to meetings from Aputula they spoke for their own patriline and country only. Those who did not go, through lack of invitation, would say, for instance, 'Our country should have spoken'.

In further illustration, as already noted, land rights and housing association meetings were attended by the ritual leader from Aputula. At the former meetings he was accompanied by another elderly man, the ritual leader of a nearby area, and at the latter he was supported by men who worked in the housing and factory project, usually Mark, the Southern Aranda ritual boss. This last man's authority depended in part on experience gained by active involvement in those projects. Other meetings, such as those of Legal Aid and church meetings, were attended by men of lesser ritual standing in Aputula country.

Obviously, problems could arise if 'representatives' were treated at meetings as if they had more authority than in fact was rightly theirs. One such possibility was avoided by an Aputula decision associated with the church. It was proposed that a Pitjantjatjara parish be formed within the Northern Synod of the Uniting Church and that the congregation at Aputula be included in it. At councils of the church, Aputula would have had a voice through the parish representatives. These people were unlikely to come from Aputula because of the relatively small size of the church membership. The group, therefore, refused to join the large Pitjantjatjara parish because, they said, the Ernabella men could not speak for them nor would Ernabella men so presume. Had the position been reversed, Aputula men could not speak for Ernabella. This, they added, is a 'big law', for Aborigines speak only for their own place and kin.

Aputula joined instead the Alice Springs parish, linking up with a predominantly white group, not because they were fringe dwellers but because they were traditional people and did not yield the authority to speak for them to Aborigines from other country. When asked to send their own representative to meetings, the church leader, a man of lesser patriline, would go, for he was an Aputula resident and as such under local control. If not, a white could speak for them.

'Representatives' faced a number of problems at meetings. As well as being asked for information that according to interactional norms they should not give, representatives could be asked also to take decisions for people or country other than their own. Aputula avoided this situation because the recognised ritual leader attended meetings himself. Others avoided the difficulty by refusing to be representatives. This was so of some from Ernabella, men of ability from that community but not traditional leaders there. They were sent to meetings but, after one or two, they refused to continue, wishing to honour their traditional kin relationships. In this way they avoided the possibility of being put in the position of taking decisions or voting about concerns that were not rightly theirs.

Clearly it is one thing to be accorded authority by kin, taking up traditional standing relative both to kin and to land, but another to be accorded authority from an alien perspective. If that happens, if a 'representative' is pressed into assuming authority that is

not his traditionally, or alternatively if he 'makes himself the boss', it can damage his position with the home community.

The following example shows the conflict between western and traditional ideas. The incident involves mainly Peter and Mark (the Pitjantjatjara and Aranda ritual leaders at Aputula), Michael (a younger classificatory brother of Mark) and Paul (a man whose ritual standing at Aputula was less than that of the other men).

When he was a child, Michael lived at Aputula, but when his father died, his mother moved away taking him with her. After that he visited Aputula from time to time, but did not stay long and, as an adult, made Alice Springs his base. For this reason he had no part in the activities that, in the meantime, had been going forward at Aputula. He had not been involved in the store, in the factory, in housing association affairs, and so on. Then in 1973 meetings were held to which Aboriginal communities were requested to send representatives. One was held in Darwin, but no invitation was received at Aputula. Later, Ernabella participants reported that Michael had been there on Aputula's behalf. Not long afterwards (June of that year), a similar meeting was held in Alice Springs at which the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) was formed. It was attended by Aboriginal representatives from all over Central Australia, but Aputula heard of this meeting only after it had taken place and then through an article published in the local Alice Springs newspaper. In that article Michael was listed as the Aputula representative.

At a meeting of the community Michael's action was at once condemned. Reasons given were that he had made himself the boss and that he was of little ritual standing. Further information, passed on by Ernabella men, added fuel to the flames. At the Darwin meeting Michael said that Aputula was his father's country, that he was going to look after it but that men from the west were making themselves the bosses in the area. This was a clear reference to Paul and one of his close kin who also lived and worked at Aputula.

Following this report Mark and Paul visited Alice Springs. They enlisted the support of another classificatory brother of both Mark and Michael, a man who had lived at Aputula over years and had only recently moved away following the death of his wife. He and Mark, but not Paul, had authority to deal with Michael. This they did at a meeting that took place in Paul's presence. As he recounted later, Mark said to Michael, 'You did not sit with us; you did not write letters; you did not ask [reference to council letters requesting government help]. You cannot make yourself the boss'. These remarks were reinforced by the other brother.

In August of the same year, meetings were again held in Alice Springs in connection with the formation of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC). Aputula sent four representatives, two of whom were Peter and Mark. It was mentioned that if Michael gave any trouble, then these two could control him. Paul and his kinsman said at once that they would not consider going and, although each had a job with a government agency, gave as a reason that they did not work for Aputula—presumably not for Aputula as country. With this statement the two men contrasted their government jobs with those in the building and housing projects, both of which, as we have seen, probably held some ritual significance. Actually, as Paul said afterwards, the intention was to repudiate Michael's accusation levelled in Darwin.

At this Alice Springs meeting Michael did get control of the microphone and said that he would be engaged in selling houses, a job for which Mark was already chosen. He thus 'put himself in' again, and due to the crowded meeting and a lack of experience, the men from Aputula did not get a chance to reply. On his return to Aputula Peter dictated two letters (one each to the CAAC and the NACC) and among the points he made were these:

- Michael has been thinking on his own;
- He wants Aputula;
- Charlotte Waters is his country, but Aputula was his father's;
- He left Aputula as a child;
- His older brother, Mark, is continually at Aputula and together we look after the country all the time.

Peter went on to say that he himself wanted to attend the important meetings, but that Michael had nominated himself for the Darwin meeting, of which Aputula remained in ignorance. He signed the letters as Leader of Aputula Country, Councillor, President of the Housing Association.

The importance for authority of kinship, locality and ritual standing, all associated with interactional process, is clear. The example shows also that authority accrues through taking part in events, that is, through active participatory interaction. Such things are the more important when it is recalled that secular interaction like sacred is in accord with the functioning of the universe, giving the meetings cosmic significance. The above example spells out also the qualifications necessary for a person to speak for a particular site or country, and despite some real and recognised connection through his father, that was not sufficient on its own to give Michael authority to speak for Aputula. In short, the example can be understood by noting an interactional concrete concept of process and a concrete notion of authority, which incorporates a need for participatory interaction. The influence of these things on Aboriginal politics is obvious.

In this example we see what happens when people from outside a particular community, who are perhaps not fully acquainted with all the facts or who are perhaps politically motivated, accept someone as representative who is not acceptable to the community itself. At the same time, the reason for that unacceptability may itself be politically motivated. The example suggests also what can happen when the Aboriginal concept of authority is confronted by the western more abstract (second degree) notion, a notion of authority that is not tied to specific land and totem and for which kinship is irrelevant. To such an impartial concept, the position of representative is congenial. The result of the conceptual encounter is that, at meetings, those who use the western concept often accord Aboriginal participants more authority than is rightly theirs. Consequently, the position of 'representative' provides a non-traditional power base for any who may wish to use it. This opportunity is the more ripe for exploitation since, from the traditional perspective, the representative through his/her participation does indeed develop some personal power. Therefore Aborigines who attend meetings and who are treated as representatives can be placed in an invidious position, expected to speak and vote about things over which they have no authority.

In the present example, nothing so drastic happened. Michael, however, tried to take up the authority offered, thereby 'making himself the boss' and, in traditional eyes, forging real authority (first order) through experience. This action brought a strong reaction against him from the community on ritual and other grounds.

Summary

These examples show Aboriginal political action in a situation of white contact. The game played has not been invented by Aborigines as a result of the white presence, nor has it been learned from whites. Instead, as a source of supply and base for authority, whites have contributed an additional factor and, therefore, an additional degree of freedom ripe for political exploitation according to traditional rules and concepts. In contact with whites the process of Aboriginal politics is merely brought into sharper relief.

NOTES

1. In order to retain anonymity, actual names are not used. Two men, both now deceased, are identifiable because of the importance of their roles: Peter, the senior Pitjantjatjara man, and Mark, the senior Southern Aranda.
2. A further example, one from Ernabella mission (now Pukatja community), is relevant. The Aboriginal butcher sold meat that he bought from the mission, but he was losing money fast. He was told that he had to get a certain value for the meat he sold. His response was to charge his relatives less than the 'correct' price and to charge other people more. This was an adaptation possible when there was only the one outlet. Again number was used to advance interaction between related persons, but basically the system of interaction itself had not changed at Ernabella any more than at Aputula, merely its expression.
3. Aboriginal people often thought that they were being overcharged. I saw many of the accounts, however, and the Aborigines acknowledged receiving the goods. I have no reason to believe that Aborigines were charged more than whites on accounts.
4. While Aboriginal housing programmes were funded by direct grants, the proposed factory was a commercial operation and thus a loan was sought. The loan, unlike the grants, would have to be repaid.
5. These appointees were themselves selling houses in the Aboriginal market and in commercial terms were Aputula's opposition.
6. *Maḷanypa* 'younger brother, younger sister'.
7. Further moves against the visiting men had already been taken. Men had been dispatched to Ernabella and Alice Springs to tell the men in those places what had happened, since, due to ritual associations, they also had been under attack. Then a month later, the man who had been the chief offender fell ill and was taken to the Alice Springs hospital. Word was sent to Aputula requesting that two men go up to treat the sick man and to show that he had not been 'sung', but he died within hours of the message being sent. Later, word was received from his relatives that no retaliatory action was planned. The summing up seemed to be that a gross offence had been committed, that he asked for it and he got it. Different Aputula men said that they had done nothing, but usually, after a pause, that perhaps someone somewhere else might have taken action. At Aputula, after the death

the mother's brother of the deceased was easier in mind, for he had been worried lest he be held responsible. White people said that the cause of death was physical, not psychical.

8. The same type of thing occurs also in white society, but not necessarily based on kinship.

9. The father, an aged pensioner, spent many months in hospital during his last illness. During this time his pension accumulated.

10. This statement was not strictly correct, for some camel hunting had been financed through the grant, and Paul had a saddle to show for it.

11. A view possibly strengthened by the absence among Aborigines of the western concept of work and the absence of a word for it in traditional Pitjantjatjara.

12. This was the case at Aputula in respect of the jobs in the store, clinic and police force, but the factory and building work, as shown above, appeared to have some ritual standing. Aborigines who took positions of responsibility in that work were those who were ritually senior at Aputula.

13. This finding appears to contrast with observations of Kolig (Kolig 1974:31).

10

Conclusions and Consequences: Theory

THE PROBLEM ANSWERED

Traditional Aborigines and whites have some difficulty in understanding one another, but what causes the communication loss? To answer the question, we have identified and then compared the ideas through which Aborigines and Westerners understand the world about them and themselves within it. Stated in its most general and basic form our finding is this, that Aboriginal and western conceptual systems and world views differ in significant respects. As a result, when Aborigines and whites interpret events, they draw on differing world views. Consequently, they can, and often do, construe the one event differently and so have different expectations of it. In either case, whether ideas only are involved or whether action also is included, cross-cultural communication can be impaired or lost. As a result, an Aborigine says, 'The white man has a secret', but a white Australian says, 'You can't get to know a black'.

Given then that Aboriginal and western world views differ, what are the important differences? This study has identified two. The first is a general contrast: that Aboriginal abstractions retain a direct link with reality (first degree abstractions) but that those used by Westerners often break the direct link (second degree abstractions). The second contrast focuses attention on a specific and important example of the first general point: that in Aboriginal society all social process is interactional in type but that western society uses both interaction and transaction. These processes are first and second degree abstractions respectively.

The two major contrasts presented here have been helpful in explaining a wide range of examples in which communication between Aborigines and whites was either partially or totally lost. The same tools are useful in explaining the examples given in chapter 1 when defining the area of study. Most of those original incidents can be understood using the two different types of process: Aborigines assume one of interaction, but whites a process of transaction. This tool explains the following;

- the old man's expectation that I would give him an advance on his next pension and his anger that I did not;
- the expectation that I would collect wood for my Aboriginal brother and anger that I did not;
- anger that I was not too weary to dress the wound of a stranger but too tired to go rabbiting with my brother;

- the immediate dispersal among relatives of rations, given to Aboriginal workers for a forthcoming journey, with the expectation that more would be available from whites en route;

- the expectation that gifts given one day herald more the next;

- the expectation that everyone who could squeeze onto a vehicle would be able to join a trip.

The remaining three examples depend for explanation on the other tool, the contrast between degrees of abstraction:

- Aboriginal restraint in offering help with a long or heavy job, yet readiness to assist when asked. This practice is linked to the concept of authority, a first degree abstraction. By waiting for the request, the Aborigines respect the other person, politely refraining from pushing in or from taking over the job. As a result they do not advance their own authority at the expense of another person's;

- Aboriginal anger when asked to look for a lost article; despite the white person's efforts to avoid misunderstanding, they think they are accused of taking it;

- anger and a fight when an Aborigine was asked to clean up after a disaster; he thought he was blamed for it.

The two explanatory tools are adequate, therefore, to elucidate all of the examples, none of which was fully understood at the time, although not all were totally unexpected. All had resulted in frustration or anger or disappointment on the part of Aborigines and sometimes of whites.

Two points must be made. First, other explanations can sometimes be given, particularly in seemingly simple cases such as those just noted. In the last two examples we might say that Aborigines get angry because they are often blamed when things go wrong. That is a possible reason and no doubt is sometimes justified, but were we to accept it at face value, nothing would be explained beyond that particular type of difficulty. Further, the problem is persistent and widespread yet it is unlikely that whites in general blame Aborigines in general. Indeed, over the years, when working with Aboriginal friends, the reverse was often the case. Nevertheless, if Aborigines do prefer the first order of abstraction, as this study has shown, it could often seem to them that they are blamed when nothing is further from their white friend's mind. We return, therefore, to our explanation: that in these examples Aborigines and whites have used different degrees of abstraction. That conclusion accords with the data as a whole and gives a broadly based explanation.

Second, not all misunderstandings or losses in communication can be attributed to the two tools used. For one thing, such a view would imply that people who share the same basic concepts never disagree among themselves—an obvious fallacy. Furthermore, the whole field of communication has not been covered.

What we can say is that the contrasts noted between Aboriginal and western world views and conceptual systems have constituted valuable explanatory tools in the many examples cited. In addition, the contrasts have further implications both for theory (this chapter) and for practice (chap. 11) in the continuing encounter of Aborigines and whites.

CONTRAST IN WORLD VIEWS: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study has identified a basic set of assumptions, concepts and categories of thought that underlie the Aboriginal conceptual system and world view. Some of the elements of that set are supported directly by empirical evidence. For instance, we can show the presence of 1:1 relationship but the absence of number. Again, there is substantial support for the concepts of space and time. Other ideas in the set are merely implicit or have been elucidated through a process of logical analysis, in particular, the notion of causality. Can we rely, therefore, on the conceptual set proposed? In the first place, the use of logic in this study (chap. 3) is confirmed by Wallace's work (1977; 1990). Through empirical research he identified elements of Pitjantjatjara world view (a spiritual element and ritual process) that accord with the epistemological concepts derived logically in this text (the totemic properties and ritual process). His empirical work endorses the methodology and, at the same time, confirms that Aboriginal concepts and world view are systematic. Again, the analysis has received support from an examination of Pitjantjatjara, one of the languages spoken at Aputula, and from an assessment of answers given by Aputula Aborigines to questions posed by a white. Furthermore, the contrast between Aboriginal and western ideas has been valuable in elucidating many events of the Aboriginal-white encounter. All these things help to substantiate the findings, favouring acceptance of the analysis as a whole. We continue, therefore, to accept the validity of the basic Aboriginal conceptual set as given and consider what else we can learn from it. By so doing we deliberately look behind concepts such as 'Dreaming' and the 'life essence', *kurunpa,* to the underlying implicit and more basic concepts.

The consequences of conceptual commitment

The conceptual system that people use influences their understanding, and the fundamental concepts and categories of thought are of particular importance. At the same time, the control exerted by one's own system of ideas is difficult to gauge, for cultural horizons are invisible, and other areas of exploration are out of sight. It is easier to see freedoms and limitations when examining someone else's ideas, but then, having done so, we can turn the spotlight back onto ourselves and learn something of our own conceptual parameters. We attempt to do this now and note that in such a study, comparison continues to be the useful tool. Previously we examined basic Aboriginal and western concepts in order to understand social events (both sacred and profane) and to understand the sacred functioning of the universe. Attention is directed now to Aboriginal ideas about nature including those about its non-sacred or profane functioning.

The proposed investigation is not easy, for the concepts we seek are not explicit and to achieve even tentative identification it is necessary to look for the implicit. We can assume that Aborigines have not found it necessary to identify concepts like those that interest Westerners. As Stanner for one pointed out, Dreaming is the Aboriginal answer to all the how and why questions (Stanner 1979:29). In a word, by contrast with western ideas, the Aboriginal perspective is based on an understanding of the world characterised

by totemic belief and the *tjukurpa* or Dreaming quality. What we uncover, therefore, must be compatible with that.

Features of the Aboriginal world view

Several features of the Aboriginal world view have been identified already:

- The universe and human life require maintenance by human beings;
- This sustaining is effected through ritual action, and as a result, nature pursues its wonted course;
- Natural (like ritual) process is interactional in type.

Related to these features, we have seen that in ritual, men do not coerce nature into an 'unnatural' or unaccustomed activity or into 'unnatural' or unaccustomed associations. Instead, they cooperate with it. Furthermore, we have argued that, in ritual, men do not symbolise desired natural events but give them actual expression. Consideration of these last two points leads to the idea that at least in significant respects, ritual and physical events parallel each other and that the same or similar components are involved. If that be so it suggests that:

- The totemic groupings, or sacred unities, prominent in ritual are paralleled in the natural world by similar groupings;
- These natural features like their sacred counterparts relate to each other as 1:1;
- 'Members' of any one group have in common a classifying totemic property, for instance, emu-ness;
- Such properties likewise relate to each other as 1:1.

These then are some of the features (implicit) in Aboriginal understanding of nature, but two topics remain for brief discussion: Aboriginal understanding of efficient cause in nature and a problem about properties of matter.

On the topic of natural cause, we can note from the outset that from a western perspective, the search may well be said to fail. Notwithstanding if we concentrate attention on the Aboriginal ideas instead of clinging to our own, then some understanding can be reached. In this search we have only to note now that in ritual, undertaken to maintain the universe and/or humanity, it is the totemic properties borne by elements such as *kurunpa* that are causal. This observation opens up two possibilities: either through ritual action they become effective *on* nature, causing natural forces to come into operation, or they become effective *in* nature.

Gathering our ideas together we can note that from the Aboriginal perspective, efficient cause in nature is totemic in type and it functions through a process of interaction. But we cannot rightly decide whether it acts *on* or *in* nature. If we choose the first option, we assume a separation between spiritual and natural cause. This idea is present in the western world view, but on the evidence available, Aboriginal ideas do not support the assumption. It is preferable, therefore, to note only the explicit Aboriginal belief: that

through ritual the spiritual initiates and that what happens as a result in nature is *tjukurpa*, eternal and true. Aborigines, it seems, have found no need to distinguish between spiritual and natural cause and they do not do so. In other words, Aborigines have not sought physical answers for what to them are essentially spiritual questions. Conversely, neither has western science sought spiritual answers for what it regards as physical questions.

With regard to properties of matter, we consider the suitability of comparing Aboriginal totemic properties and those of western science. The possibility that this comparison might be appropriate was advanced and to some extent explored and supported during examination of ritual (chap. 3), but the idea needs confirmation. Two points made earlier are useful now. First we argued that, at least implicitly, totemic properties are abstracted by Aborigines in classifying human beings, plant and animal species, and inanimate matter. These properties are causal and each, to be effective, requires the presence of its 'partner', that is, the 'opposing' property. When that condition is met a causal interaction can occur. Furthermore, Wallace's empirical work confirms that the process is interactional. Second, the scientist's properties of matter underlie western understanding of natural cause, and this operates through a chain reaction of cause and effect. It is clear that the Aboriginal paired, totemic properties are, of their nature, suitable for conceived causal interaction but are not appropriate to chain reaction. Conversely, the western properties of matter are appropriate to causal chain reaction but are unsuited to process conceived as interaction. Identification, therefore, of interactional process in nature and rejection of chain reaction are in keeping with the view that Aboriginal totemic properties can rightly be compared with the western properties of matter. That comparison is in order. It would not have been appropriate had Aborigines abstracted from process the idea of a chain reaction. In other words, these various properties occupy comparable slots in Aboriginal and western conceptual systems and world views. Similarly, Aboriginal binary opposition (1:1 relationship) and western quantification can rightly be compared, for each within its own conceptual system provides the means to describe the relationships between the conceived properties of matter.

Comparison of Aboriginal and western concepts

We have now a basic set of concepts (some of them implicit) that underlie the Aboriginal understanding of nature. This set is compatible with Aboriginal belief. We can proceed, therefore, to compare the Aboriginal and western sets, an exercise that introduces discussion about the consequences of conceptual commitment. Basic Aboriginal notions are given in the table below, with the comparable western ideas placed alongside.

Table 2. Aboriginal and western concepts about the human and natural worlds

	Aboriginal	Western
The nature of being (ontological assumption):	the physical world and/or human life requires maintenance by human beings	the physical exists without human intervention
Conceptual units:	units such as emus, rocks, people are classified into 'unities' (e.g. Emu, Kangaroo); unities are ahistoric; either transcend space or are tied to specific land.	units such as emus, rocks, people are analysed into component parts (e.g. molecules, atoms): component parts are within historic time; have specific location in space.
Abstracted property common to human beings, plant and animal species, inanimate matter:	totemic properties (e.g. emu-ness) are basis of classification (patterned on kinship); related as 1:1	properties of matter (e.g. weight, volume, mass, velocity) are basis for classification; complex relations
Efficient cause (stimulus):	grounded in totemic properties	grounded in properties of matter
Causal process:	interaction; ahistoric	chain reaction of cause and effect; subject to chronological time

Several points in this table are worth noting. In the first place, Aborigines and whites differ in their view about the nature of being and, consequently, differ also about the human role or goal or final purpose within the universe. Next, in understanding the world around them Aborigines appear to work at what might be termed the macro-level. They take notice of features that are available to sensory perception (rocks, trees, people) and effectively, by abstracting a common property, group them into larger wholes, the totemic unities. These abstracted properties, like the unities, relate to each other as 1:1. By contrast, whites focus attention at the micro-level, searching out component parts. They identify entities that are not available directly to the senses, such as molecules, radio waves and viruses, and through the use of mathematics express the relationship between properties such as weight, volume, mass, velocity. These properties of matter are like those abstracted by Aborigines in that each in their respective ideational system is associated with the conceptualisation of causality. They contrast in that the Aboriginal properties are totemic in nature and unquantifiable, but the western properties refer to physical features which can be quantified.

In the verbal sphere, as in the nominal, abstracted notions of the two conceptual systems are again different, with the Aboriginal process of causal interaction contrasting with the western idea of a chain reaction of cause and effect.

The Aboriginal and western ideas constitute two different basic sets of concepts, categories and assumptions, each internally coordinated. As examination further shows, the only elements in common are the conceptual units that are available to sensory perception such as emus, rocks and people. All the abstracted notions contrast—for instance, emu-ness and weight. Here we have the underlying building blocks, not merely for two conceptual systems but for alternative systems. We can expect, therefore, alternative themes, not two variations on the one basic theme. We can further predict that it would be impossible for members of one culture to accept one or more notions from the other culture without damaging or destroying their own conceptual system, although intellectually they might grasp the other view.

As this discussion makes clear, each person, Aborigine or white, is equally conceptually subject to and limited by his own basic ideas, both explicit and implicit. As it were, he is trapped within his own universe and, because of his particular commitment, is prevented from living in an alternative world. Yet Westerners have been inclined to think that they can make any and all generalisations. While this might be so theoretically, certain abstractions on logical grounds preclude the possibility of certain others. One is reminded of the old conundrum that used to make us laugh as children: Why is a horse like a teapot? Because neither can climb a tree. Given one's world view, not all abstractions are profitable!

Despite the limitations imposed by a particular conceptual system, considerable freedoms are also present. The contrast drawn above is uncompromising because we are considering alternatives in the fundamental, basic sets of ideas. We can expect that each basic set will provide the foundation for a range of conceptual edifices: variations on the theme. In the totemic world this is perhaps shown by the different types of totemism practised in different parts of the continent. These practices could well exemplify variations on the one underlying conceptual theme. If that is so, then the coordinated basic set of notions worked out in the Central Australian context would have wider application and could be expected to appear in different cultural guise among different groups of Aboriginal people. For instance, in the Central Australian world, totemic properties are causal and effective in creative rites. Among other Aboriginal groups an abstracted totemic property might lack the causal element or it might have no creative significance. Again, through Wallace's work (chap. 3) we have seen one example of how basic epistemological notions are incorporated in world view, in that case in association with a concept of *kurunpa*, the life essence or spirit. Variations can be expected in this domain also.

We can suggest that over thousands of years the thinking of both Aborigines and whites has been subjected to direction, each in terms of their basic set of coordinated ideas. The result has led to alternative abstractions and alternative world views, but the whole world that is significant to each can be known through the conceptual system that is used. This leads to the hypothesis that the basic coordinated set of ideas through which people understand the natural world and their relation to it determines what they know about it and what they can know about it.

Implications for psychological theory

Piaget's theory of cognitive development

During discussion of Piagetian theory we generalised from one of Piaget's basic ideas (chap. 4). Accordingly we argued that cognitive development occurs through interaction of the individual with the natural environment as it is in reality, and also with the natural environment as it is conceived to be by members of a particular culture. It might be expected, therefore, that characteristics of the world view, such as the degree of abstraction, would be reflected in the thinking used by the individual members of the culture. The data endorses that expectation. Expressing this in a little more detail, we can say that the concepts an individual abstracts from the environment will be in keeping with the world view within which he/she is immersed and will be significant for his/her cognitive performance. In other words, the conceptual system and world view within which the individual grows up steers him or her towards certain abstractions but away from others. Some will make sense, others will be irrelevant or contrary to the world view, but which abstractions are favoured and which are not will have an effect on the individual's performance.

Having made this point, we pause for a moment to remind ourselves of the concept of invariance, an important feature in Piaget's description of cognitive development. A comment on this topic was foreshadowed during discussion of Piagetian theory (chap. 4). As the reader will recall, at the pre-operatory level of cognitive development a baby or young child is aware that objects show constancy in form. In Piagetian terms he/she is able to apply the principle of invariance but, at this stage of development, only in respect of what is available directly to sensory perception. Later, at the concrete operatory level, the child applies the same principle, abstracting from reality notions such as quantity (the example given). By so doing the child shows ability to recognise a constancy not available to the senses. Later again the growing individual reapplies the principle of invariance to content of increasing abstraction from the concretely real.

With this in mind, we return now to the point made above: that world view affects an individual's use of abstraction, so influencing his/her cognitive performance. We can now add that it affects also application of the principle of invariance. In other words, our observation suggests that the range of abstractions appropriate to a particular world view and conceptual system may hinder application of basic operatory skills and the principle of invariance to content of increasing distance or abstraction from reality. This limitation comes about because skills are applied and invariance sought only in respect of matters that are relevant to, or conform with, the world view and conceptual system. When matters do not so conform, skills are not applied and invariance is not sought. Where the individual's preferences lie, whether or not he applies cognitive processes to content of lesser or of greater abstraction, is determined by world view, including the basic concepts upon which it rests. This proposition we advanced tentatively following the introduction to Piagetian theory (chap. 4).

These theoretical findings explain our data and underline two points, the first to do

with communication and the second to do with the contrast between our own and Piaget's work.

We have observed that difference in world view is associated with difference in the deployment of skills or processes. This differential use of skills affects cross-cultural communication. What some of these effects are can be readily observed, for instance by considering conditional sentences. In that context the use of the cognitive processes on more or on less abstract content, that is, whether or not content remains tied to the real or breaks that link, makes a substantial difference to what is communicated. Furthermore a break from reality in conditional constructions confers some measure of logical freedom not otherwise available, as Piaget stated. This freedom is shown also in the handling of generalised principles and of possibilities, but again, second degree abstraction is required. In other words, severance of the direct link with reality opens up opportunities that are commonly exploited by western thinking but they are not available with the first order abstractions used by Aborigines. All of these features are shown in the data.

It is uncertain what the significance of these empirical findings are for psychology, and perhaps they are of little theoretical importance. Psychologists could well point out that in domains not explored by us, Aboriginal thought in all probability breaks the direct link with concrete reality, and that is indeed possible. In that case the task of psychological research would be to identify the circumstances under which it happens and to show it happening. Nevertheless, such a response to the data would merely underline the alternative concerns of the two disciplines: psychology's interest in cognitive structure and process, but in this study, anthropology's interest in cognitive content, specifically as that affects cross-cultural communication in daily affairs. That being so we repeat the observation that in everyday contexts, people's preferences contrast, with western ideas breaking the direct link with reality but Aboriginal notions retaining that link with the concretely real. This difference is the cause of some cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Looking now at our own and Piaget's work, we find that the association we have shown between world view and cognitive performance has implications for Piaget's notion of conservation and for related testing. We look first at theory and then at Piagetian research.

Key features of any world view are the abstracted properties of matter, either implicit or explicit, and the relationships between them. Properties of matter are important also in Piagetian theory and testing. As noted, psychologists look for competence in the conservation of concepts such as weight and volume. These and other related properties, all integral to the Westerner's understanding of the world, are quantifiable, and quantification is necessary to express the relationships between them. By contrast, implicit in the Aboriginal world view are properties such as kangaroo-ness, emu-ness and goanna-ness. These notions are unquantifiable and related to each other as 1:1. These things we have seen.

The contrast in world views shown here in respect of properties of matter is not accommodated adequately in Piaget's theory. For psychologists the domain in question is that of conservation and of quantifiable, abstracted concepts. Another possibility would be to regard it as the domain of properties of matter, be they Aboriginal, western or any other, and to treat quantification as a separate issue. Without some such accommodation,

Piagetian theory appears to set limits that in cross-cultural situations may obscure ability in abstracting culturally relevant properties.

In order to reconcile the two perspectives, we suggest, if somewhat tentatively, that by their use of totemic abstractions and those of the classificatory kinship system traditional Aborigines show ability in a type of conservation.[1] This proposal parallels in respect of cognitive ability what we have already argued of cognitive content. In that case we showed two things, firstly, that the Aboriginal abstractions such as kangaroo-ness and the Westerner's abstractions such as weight lie in comparable slots in their respective conceptual systems and world view; and secondly, that the 1:1 binary opposition of the Aboriginal world view and the Westerner's quantification likewise occupy comparable slots, each within their own conceptual system.

As this suggests, Piagetian theory does not deal adequately with the fact that quantifiable concepts are not found in all cultures and that, instead, other concepts take their place. To investigate these things we examine the writing of Piagetian psychologists, specifically that of Dasen and of Seagrim and Lendon, paying particular attention to conservation. Relevant sections of both accounts are set out and then discussed.

The work of Dasen, Seagrim and Lendon

As observed earlier, Dasen uses an ecocultural model, but to facilitate the present discussion we set his hypothesis down again, giving more detail than previously. With the ecocultural framework in mind, Dasen predicts that people of hunter and gatherer societies who have to range over a wide territory would develop operatory spatial concepts more rapidly than members of settled agricultural communities. He also predicts that sedentary agriculturalists, who have to handle production, accumulation and exchange of food, would achieve concepts of conservation such as weight and volume more rapidly than hunters and gatherers. This brief notation gives both aspects of his hypothesis which was amply supported empirically. He explains his results in terms of values, suggesting that agriculturalists value skills in conservation more highly than do hunters and gatherers who place a greater value than agriculturalists on spatial concepts (Dasen 1975:158).

Seagrim and Lendon's (1980) work shows the same general orientation as that of Dasen. Their research, undertaken with Aranda children in Central Australia, reflects a primary interest in the nature and development of logical thinking. They record three main findings: first, that their Aboriginal subjects have the same capacity for concrete operatory reasoning as western children; next, that for this competence to be shown, the children must be subject to heavy acculturation by 'total immersion' in western society. At the same time, they must be isolated from traditional Aboriginal culture. Lastly they show that conservation skills, which have to do with quantification, are sensitive to this process of acculturation (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:181-2; 193-4). To explain their findings, Seagrim and Lendon suggest that white culture provides an 'incentive' that favours the development of skills in quantification whereas Aboriginal culture does not do so and even discourages such skills (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:194, 202). This proposition provides the authors with a theoretical basis from which to pursue investigations, and their first move is to consider

the Aboriginal world view. Finding the enquiry unsatisfactory, they turn their attention to social practice, noting in particular any factors that might affect quantification (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:200-1). They identify three, and the first of these, an economic factor, will be used in illustration.

In Aboriginal society, write Seagrim and Lendon, personal ownership is of little significance, but economic exchanges are particularly important. This give and take is not based on quantitative considerations, but instead, Aborigines are interested in the fact of an exchange and the nature of its content, that is, what is exchanged and 'that it is exchanged' rather than how much. Seagrim and Lendon explain that through the exchanges, Aborigines construct a 'network of reciprocal obligations' and it is this network that 'largely holds Aboriginal society together. . .' Citing Bain (Bain 1979), they consider Aboriginal interactional practice and the transactional economics favoured by Westerners and point to the mutual incompatibility of the two modes (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:201).

Before commencing discussion we have to reject Seagrim and Lendon's economic determinism. The patterning of Aboriginal society is based on kinship, and that provides the framework for all social practice of which economic exchange is only a part. This fact is amply attested in the anthropological literature and there is no need to labour the point. We set this disagreement aside, therefore, to address what is important to us.

Dasen, Seagrim and Lendon are interested in conservation, and so their attention is directed to quantifiable concepts and to the related skills in quantification. Within this field they give different, if related, explanations for cross-cultural variation in performance on the conservation tasks. Dasen holds that skills in conservation are more highly valued among agriculturalists than among hunters and gatherers. Seagrim and Lendon working with western and Aranda children point to an incentive that promotes the quantification skills. This stimulus is provided by western but not by Aboriginal culture.

As this brief summary shows, the world view and conceptual system of each culture individually is not taken into account. Instead attention is focused on a particular domain, in this case quantification. Accordingly Dasen is able to compare two cultures, noting the relative value placed on it. While this is a useful procedure in respect of a particular domain or concept, the result is that one culture is seen negatively relative to the other; that is, a positive feature is contrasted with a negative. In the present example, effectively quantification is contrasted with little or no quantification. Seagrim and Lendon also contrast positive with negative since they note that the economic exchange practices of western society promote the development of quantification skills but those of Aboriginal society do not. In other words, Aboriginal practice is described negatively relative to western and not in its own right. Stimulation, therefore, is contrasted with no stimulation or with neglect, to use Seagrim and Lendon's term. In short, in some respects Piagetians make allowance for cultural concerns such as alternative values and alternative practices. Nevertheless, in explaining cross-cultural performance differences, world view is not taken into account and the negative orientation remains.

This then is the general approach adopted by Seagrim and Lendon and by Dasen alike, and it accords with Piaget's own approach. But in addition, a further and important element is implicit in the work of Seagrim and Lendon. In summarising their ideas they state that instead of being encouraged towards skills in quantification, the Aboriginal child is

'actively discouraged' (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:202). These words, 'actively discouraged', introduce a new dimension suggesting the presence of a disincentive, vigorously pursued. We are not now dealing with the lack of something but with the presence of an alternative. Through Seagrim and Lendon's remark, Aboriginal economic practice begins to be seen for itself, not as some kind of failed incentive, if we may put it that way, but as an active discourager. Seagrim and Lendon do not pursue this idea and so fail to uncover the heart of the matter. In order to do that it is necessary to look at world view, and when this is done a deeply rooted disincentive to quantification is not difficult to identify.

As this study has shown, the western properties of matter such as weight and volume and the Aboriginal totemic properties such as emu-ness fill comparable slots in their respective world views. Similarly quantification and binary opposition fill comparable slots in western and Aboriginal world views respectively. This finding suggests that the use of binary opposition constitutes the major disincentive to quantification. In support of this conclusion, it is helpful to recall that quantification is used in western society to express the relationship between the properties of matter and so to explain causality. Likewise binary opposition fills the same role in the Aboriginal world view. Furthermore, the quantifiable properties such as weight and volume are integral to the tests for conservation in which Aborigines have a relatively poor showing. In the light of this observation, instead of contrasting quantification with no quantification, the alternative dichotomy is preferable, that is, quantification/binary opposition. This second contrast makes it clear that if binary opposition acts as a disincentive to quantification, then equally quantification acts as a disincentive to binary opposition. Which of the two is seen as disincentive depends on the world view of the observer. These things raise an important practical issue and we look at it briefly.

As we have just shown, Seagrim and Lendon do not identify binary opposition as an impediment to quantification nor do they realise that identification of such impediments varies with the enquirer's world view. Nevertheless they have noted that quantification is antagonistic to Aboriginal exchange practices although important for those of Westerners. Seagrim and Lendon go on to apply this observation to practical affairs and, accordingly, suggest that teaching numeracy in Aboriginal schools would be very disruptive to Aboriginal society and culture (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:212). Such a suggestion would be unlikely to arise from Dasen's work. In the latter, quantification is valued in one culture and not so much antagonistic to another as of little value to it. From this perspective teaching number would merely introduce something that is (temporarily) lacking and any question of displacing a culturally valid and valued alternative would not arise. This would support a view that numeracy could be taught without having a disruptive influence. These considerations underline the importance of world view in cross-cultural contexts if explanations of performance difference are to be applied.

In short, this study questions Piaget's treatment of culture, but we can proceed no further in this interdisciplinary endeavour. To make any such attempt is beyond this anthropologist who has perhaps ventured dangerously far already. Perforce, therefore, we leave these observations and suggestions and move to other areas of theoretical interest.

Implications for language and Aboriginal practice

In connection with the material presented it is inevitable that several questions will arise, and we will look first at the question of language. What role does it play in shaping a people's ideas? Whorf advanced the view that language controls the understanding of reality (Whorf 1956:246 ff.), and it could be argued that there is some support for his theory in the Aboriginal data. A closer look must dispel the notion for, as the evidence shows, Aborigines do not seem to exploit fully the lexical and grammatical avenues open to them. For instance, words and linguistic structure are present in Pitjantjatjara for the use of pure hypothesis. The conditional grammatical structure is present, and there appears to be no linguistic reason to explain why Aborigines do not inject the more abstract content and therefore take advantage of a more abstract logic. White people do so in error when speaking Pitjantjatjara and, as events prove, only other whites understand what they intend to say! Aborigines, on the other hand, use this conditional grammatical form with fact or believed fact only. The introductory clause, the protasis, is not given purely hypothetical content. Since the concepts present in the world view retain a direct link with reality and the logic does so too, language appears to be the dependent variable. This conclusion agrees with Piaget and Inhelder's view that language is not the source of logic but rather is structured by it (Piaget & Inhelder 1969:89-90). Nonetheless, as the vehicle through which the conceptual system is transmitted, language has an important role to play although not the determining one.

Next the question must be asked, do traditionally oriented Aborigines sometimes use thought that is free from concrete reality? We have already had something to say on this subject, but add to that now. All that can be said is that there is no evidence here to show it. Nevertheless, it would be easy to miss. When whites use both first and second degree abstractions it is often difficult to be aware when the change is made from one to the other. Further, it may be that more abstract thought is used in the secret-sacred areas of the Aboriginal men's thinking, areas unavailable to me as a woman. Nevertheless, if such cognitive skills are developed, it is difficult to understand why they are neglected, for instance, in teaching and learning. Further, from a theoretical view point, given

- the Aboriginal concepts of teaching, learning and authority—all of them first degree abstractions;
- the associated absence of both pure hypothesis and the more abstract forms of generalisation;
- that answers to 'Why?' questions are linked directly to reality;
- that all social process conforms with the concept of interaction, a first degree abstraction.

it is difficult to envisage the presence of the more abstract forms of thought. Any such absence would be due not to a failure in development but because an alternative conceptual system was in use, one in which the particular preference is for applying skills to less rather than more abstract content.

A further question then arises: can (or could) traditional Aborigines use the more

abstract thought, given different cultural experience? The answer is 'Yes'. Many Aboriginal people have been raised to young adulthood in traditional society and subsequently immersed in white culture. These individuals do adopt more abstract forms of thought, as communication with them often bears witness. For instance, they make use of pure hypothesis and talk of a future that is tied neither to the past nor to the present. I have no doubts at all regarding this ability, for that is my experience, an experience which accords with that of Seagrim and Lendon. This suggests perhaps that through discussion and argument with people whose world view and conceptual system does include the more abstract concepts, and who use the more abstract mode of thought themselves, that Aborigines come to adopt the same practices.

Implications for anthropological theory: Hallpike and 'primitive' mentality

Having explored questions of psychological theory, it is appropriate now to examine anthropological interests that relate to them. We look in particular at the work of Hallpike and his application of Piagetian theory to the question of 'primitive' mentality.

Anthropologists have long attempted to understand the thinking of people of other cultures, and explanatory theories have been advanced by writers such as Lévy-Bruhl (1923) and Lévi-Strauss (1966), to name only two. The present enquiry, by explaining the Aboriginal-white encounter in terms of conceptual contrast, throws light on the subject. Drawing on Piagetian theory, we have argued and shown empirically that the critical differences between Aboriginal and western thought are, firstly, differences in degree of abstraction and, secondly, the importance of the particular abstractions of the epistemology and of the conceptual system as a whole. This finding, derived from the Australian material, is of general usefulness in understanding so-called 'primitive' thought and with that the thinking of industrialised peoples. This generalisation gains support from Hallpike's work although, in some important respects, the present study differs from his. If, therefore, the support is to be forthcoming, the reasons for the difference must be examined.

Hallpike and Piagetian theory

With his paper 'Is there a primitive mentality?', Hallpike (1976) directs the attention of anthropologists to Piagetian theory and, in particular, to its usefulness in understanding the mode of thought found in 'primitive' societies (my inverted commas). In a further work (1979) he argues this point at some length and in developing the idea illustrates with examples taken from many areas, such as the Pacific, Australia, Central Asia and the Middle East, Africa and Europe, and North and South America. While the data presented in the present text conform closely with that advanced by Hallpike, nevertheless we take issue with him in respect of theory. For one thing, we disagree with his reading of Piaget and, for another, we prefer to approach Piaget's theory from a different perspective. This divergence leads to different methodologies and, consequently, to differing assessments of data. For his part, Hallpike finds that 'primitive' thought generally is pre-operatory (Hallpike 1979:35, 489), but this study has identified concrete operatory thinking in

Aboriginal subjects. Further, considering Hallpike's examples from the perspective used in this text, his subjects appear to show the same cognitive performance as Aborigines. If that is correct, then my findings are appropriate also to the preliterate, pre-industrialised people that he examines. There is no need to consider the matter in detail, but a few observations will show the nature of the disagreement and, hence, the differing conclusions.

Cognitive development occurs through the individual's interaction with the natural and sociocultural environments. That, as has been noted, is Piaget's basic assumption, but what does he have to say about cross-cultural cognitive differences? Does that stem from differences in culture? The present study and that of Hallpike give different answers to that question. Piaget, writes Hallpike, 'is. . .well aware that cultural and associated environmental factors have great importance in retarding or stimulating cognitive growth. . .' (Hallpike 1979:27). In support of his view he refers the reader to Piaget's paper 'Need and significance of cross-cultural studies in genetic psychology' (Piaget 1974:299-310). Hallpike does not provide further detail (nor additional references); yet his reading of that article must be challenged.

The alternative understanding of Piaget's thought is brought out well by Dasen, and we follow part of his account. Dasen notes that Piaget's article is theoretical, an assessment of the value of cross-cultural studies in which the author's immediate aim is to identify factors that influence the development of cognitive structure. Piaget isolates four such types of factor and proposes avenues for cross-cultural investigation to find out the influence that each exerts (Dasen 1977:3-4).

The first set of factors is biological. These have to do with physiological maturation and are common to people everywhere. The next set of factors, those of equilibration, is likewise universal, as Piaget hypothesises: 'Very general and relatively independent of the social environment'. The third and fourth sets of factors are both sociocultural. Piaget distinguishes between those that are common to all societies, the interpersonal interactions, and those that differ from society to society, the educational and cultural transmissions. Factors of the interpersonal interactions are observed among people everywhere—for instance, all people ask questions, they argue with each other, they exchange information and objects. These social exchanges, writes Piaget, are not dependent on cultural transmission, are of general occurrence, and their effect on the development of cognitive structure will be the same cross-culturally. It is worth noting now that the first three factors all point to a universalist conclusion. Dasen draws attention to this by quoting Piaget's statement that they form a 'synchronistic (constant or universal) nucleus' (Dasen 1977:4).

Factors of the fourth type, those of educational and cultural transmission, remain to be considered. These have an effect through the education of children by adults and through language. Piaget recognises that language will have perhaps a strong influence, but suggests that it will be felt 'if not on the operations themselves, at least on the detail of the conceptualizations (e.g. content of classifications, relations)' (Piaget 1974:303). Quoting this, Dasen observes that by implication, by use of the word 'detail' and by reference to content, Piaget minimises the effect of these factors on cognitive development, giving them no more than a minor role (Dasen 1977:4). To appreciate Dasen's comment it should be recalled that in Piagetian theory attention is focused on cognitive structure and process.

Cognitive content is not of primary interest but instead is used to illustrate the development of structure.

In a word, as Dasen shows, Piaget takes the view that cognitive development is influenced by three types of factors that are common to all societies but that culturally specific elements have little effect on the developmental process. They will not, therefore, contribute significantly to cross-cultural cognitive differences. This reading of Piaget conflicts with that of Hallpike; nevertheless it is the preferable reading.

Hallpike's inferences from Piaget

The following quotation from Hallpike shows the grounds for a further disagreement with him. Hallpike wrote that the

> basic claim of developmental psychology to the attention of social anthropologists is that it treats the cognitive development of the child as a process of interaction between the endogenous structure of the child's thought, and the social and natural environment, as well as with the purely biological aspects of maturation. It therefore follows that different natural and social environments may affect the direction and especially the extent of cognitive development. . .(Hallpike 1976:255).

What interests us here is Hallpike's inference. First, we have just seen that in Piaget's view elements that are specific to a culture have little effect on cognitive development. Instead, those factors that are common cross-culturally have the major influence. Hallpike's inference, therefore, does not conform with Piaget's thought. At the same time, while disagreeing with Hallpike's inference as an inference, we have to agree with him concerning the social environment. In keeping with that part of his statement it has been argued in this study that the content, either more or less abstract, to which skills are applied is affected by world view. Further, in chapter 4 we reconciled Piaget's proposal with Hallpike's proposition. In the course of that discussion we noted that Piaget divides the sociocultural group of factors into two, but we argued against the idea, pointing out that it is preferable to make no division. This proposal has the effect of including the culturally specific factors among those of significance for cognitive development. As a result, in respect of the sociocultural reference, the argument brings Piaget's basic assumption into conformity with Hallpike's interpretation of it.

Second, Hallpike draws the inference that cognitive development may vary not only with differences in the sociocultural environment but also with differences in the natural environment. We disagree with his inclusion of the natural world for two reasons. For one thing, it does not conform with Piagetian theory. This can be seen by looking at Piaget's methods of testing. The tests depend on concepts to do with nature, such as weight, concepts that are the same everywhere. By their use these tests were intended to be value free and universally applicable. (Whether or not that goal was attained is a different question, although to the level of concrete operations it seems so.) Hallpike's inference, therefore, cannot rightly be drawn from Piaget's assumption.

We further disagree with Hallpike because he supports his proposal by focusing attention on the categories of thought and the concepts of western science (used by

Piagetian tests). Since these are the notions he considers important in cognitive development, Hallpike looks for features of the environment, or 'primitive milieu' as he calls it, that either promote or inhibit their recognition. He identifies many inhibitors; for instance, confinement to a limited natural or geographic area may adversely affect the understanding of space; again, use of containers that vary in size, such as baskets or bamboo tubes, may hinder conservation of quantity (Hallpike 1979:95-102). Hallpike's approach differs therefore from that of this study and it is necessary to take issue with him, as we have done with psychologists. He, like them, does not give adequate attention to cross-cultural differences in world view. As noted, this disagreement between us leads to alternative methodologies and alternative assessments of data. A few examples will show this clearly.

Hallpike and 'primitive' classification

One area examined by Hallpike is that of 'primitive' classification. Finding that his subjects do not recognise properties such as weight, volume and velocity, he searches for an alternative basis for grouping. According to him, 'primitive' classification is not based on the abstraction of taxonomic properties but on one or other of two alternative procedures. These are 'complexive classification' (after Vygotsky, grouping by factors such as association, use or appearance) and 'prototypical classification' (after Rosch, grouping by assimilation to an object accepted as prototype; Hallpike 1979:14-15, 169, 179, 196, 234-5). Accent here is on what is accessible to the senses, so that for this and other related reasons Hallpike assesses 'primitive' classification as pre-operatory.

This approach to the data differs from that used in this study because it does not examine the possibility that people of differing world views and sociocultural groups, while following the same procedure of abstraction, may reach differing results. Hallpike is not, therefore, in a position to seek comparable, alternative abstractions or to compare epistemologies or conceptual systems, an approach that has proved fruitful in the present study leading to the identification of concrete operatory reason and logical thought.

Hallpike and notions of causality

In another chapter Hallpike considers notions of causality and again, neglecting the question of world view, identifies pre-operatory thinking. He gives many examples, two of which will make the point. Both are explanations of sickness given by the Konso of East Africa. These people

> believe that mosquitoes are the cause of malaria. In the dry highlands above 5,000 feet, which are their traditional habitat, both mosquitoes and malaria are absent. . .But in the lowlands. . .mosquitoes abound and anyone who goes there from the highland plateau can expect to catch it (Hallpike 1979:441).

Konso believe also that 'the mosquitoes have evil spirits which cause the symptoms to appear in man' (Hallpike 1979:442). The explanation of what Hallpike takes to be pneumonia follows similar lines. The sickness *dodita*

> is said to occur chiefly on the plain between Konso and Gidole. . .These plains are the haunt of evil spirits and the angry ghosts of strangers who have died in Konso far from their own people, and who in consequence are enemies of living men. These spirits are supposed to be the cause of the disease. . .(Hallpike 1979:442-3).

Hallpike observes that in the first example the explanation given is correct and that it 'satisfies the base criteria of inductive logic', but he goes on to argue that it cannot be regarded as a 'fully scientific explanation'. For instance, as far as he knows, Konso have not submitted their theory to testing, nor have they eliminated other possible explanations. Instead, finding that malaria occurs where mosquitoes are prolific, they identify a causal relationship but on insufficient grounds. Hallpike suggests that Konso are not using the inductive logic of science but, instead, transductive reasoning (Hallpike 1979:441-2; 15-16), a view that directs attention to final cause, a characteristic of pre-operatory precausality.

In the second example, writes Hallpike, Konso associate sickness and locality, an association that, while invalid, is the basis of explanation. As in the previous example, reasoning is transductive. Hallpike adds that many instances of transduction 'based on *post hoc*' reasoning have been reported from 'primitive' societies, and he gives as an example a widely held belief about certain stars. They rise at a particular time of year and are said to be the cause of seasonal events that occur at the same time (Hallpike 1979:443). Hallpike does not tell us why the stars have this effect, and no doubt differing reasons are given in different cultures. He writes only that causal relationship is attributed on the basis of synchronisation.

In short, examining the understanding of causality, Hallpike observes that the Konso associate pairs of factors and postulate a casual relationship: one member of the pair is the cause of the other. In the light of this correlation he identifies transductive reasoning and a pre-operatory precausality. Nevertheless, here again, as in the matter of classification, it is preferable to direct attention to world view. In the Konso example the ideational system, not pairs of factors, is the basis of explanation. Given a belief in ghosts, given a belief that ghosts and evil spirits cause disease, given a systematic world view in which these ideas are embedded, the Konso explanations are revealed as logical. Their explanation of a person's illness does not rest on final but on efficient cause and shows concrete logical thought and concrete operatory causality.

There is more in like vein to question in Hallpike's writing, both on the topics raised here as examples (those of classification and of causality) but also on other subjects, such as the notions of time, space and process (Hallpike 1979:340 ff.). One last example looks at the question of logical argument.

Hallpike and logical argument

Piaget writes that at the level of concrete operations logic is associated with abstractions that are still linked directly to the here and now. For Piaget, therefore, fact or believed fact provides a base for the concrete mode of operatory logic and reason. Hallpike does not appear to take that view into account. This is shown, for instance, when he examines the 'primitive' milieu for the effect it may have on ability in logical argument.

Some examples are taken from Liberia and Central Asia and a number of these show the use of inference. Hallpike shows that in both Africa and Asia subjects draw inferences on the basis of their own experience and also from imaginary propositions, but only if these last are in keeping with that experience. He writes that they respond to 'hypothetical propositions based on reality' but that they do not draw inferences 'purely in terms of logic' (Hallpike 1979:118-121). Summarising at the end of the chapter, Hallpike states that his subjects' thinking is pre-operatory (Hallpike 1979:132).

An alternative judgment is preferable. This is clear from Piaget and Inhelder's account of Piaget's theory. The relevant section was quoted earlier but part is repeated here for ease of reference. As these authors describe, when concrete thinking is used,

> the logical organization of judgements and arguments is inseparable from their content. That is, the operations function only with reference to observations or representations regarded as true, and not on the basis of mere hypotheses (Piaget & Inhelder 1969:132).

Taking this into account, it seems to us that Hallpike's subjects give some evidence of concrete operatory logic. In that respect, therefore, Hallpike's material accords with the Australian data.

In short, Hallpike examines the thinking of people of so-called 'primitive' societies and gives an explanation of how it differs from the thinking of members of industrial societies. The present study considers the thought of Aborigines of Central Australia and shows how it differs from that of the white people they encounter. Both analyses draw on Piagetian theory, but differ in the understanding of that theory and in the application of it. This difference results in differing explanations. Hallpike finds his in the difference between pre-operatory and operatory thought (Hallpike 1979:35), but in this study difference has been found between the two levels of abstract thinking, between concrete and formal thought. In addition we have challenged Hallpike on theoretical and methodological grounds and, drawing examples from his data, have suggested that his subjects show ability in operatory thinking. If this analysis is correct, then his data accords with ours. This gives weight to the idea that our findings are of more than local value. It supports the view that this study, undertaken in a specific context, is significant for understanding the general issue: the difference between 'primitive' mentality and that of industrialised people. Lastly we have shown how that difference is important for understanding today's cross-cultural affairs.

Implications for cross-cultural research

This examination of Hallpike's work has shown one way in which the present study is of general theoretical interest to anthropologists. The study is useful also in considering the value and limitations of models, and we consider that now.

During the discussion of Aboriginal religion we saw that traditional Aborigines use human beings as the model through which to understand the functioning of the universe. In keeping with that model they generalise from the pattern of their own known relationships and find means to classify the social and natural worlds. Again, they use the notion of interaction occurring between living people as the model for effective process.

Whites too use models from which they generalise and so apply principles broadly. Nevertheless, that wider application may be of limited value, although within a culture the limitation may be difficult to recognise. Other people's mistaken applications are easier to identify and question than those of one's own society and culture. For this reason the 'mistake' by Aborigines, that of using human beings as a model to understand the inanimate world, provides a means of looking at the usefulness of models and the types of problems that can arise with their 'over' use. For instance, workers in western society could fall into the same kind of trap as does the Aborigine by reversing the model, that is, by taking one from the inanimate universe and applying it to the affairs of the living. On the one hand, as a result of their social or living model, Aborigines are prevented from learning more of physical, inanimate reality. On the other hand, using an inanimate model or, say, one from linguistics, we would expect Westerners to be limited in what they could know of human beings, culture and society. Such a model would show one facet, but the way would be blocked to deeper understanding of others.

The same type of methodological problem confronts anthropologists who investigate the thought of people from another culture, or of any people who have a religion or an ideology or a system of belief different from their own. If they retain their own commitment—their own basic assumptions and conceptual system—instead of attempting to identify the thought of those whom they study, then they remain shut within their own world, and this limitation would prejudice the results of the examination. If they take their own model of reality as the only reality and the basis for explanation, then fields outside the range of their own conceptual system remain out of sight, out of mind. Notwithstanding, if the researchers are logical and those they study are logical, then they could not avoid finding support for their own theories. The result of any investigation, however, would be in terms of the initial alien imposition. Useful connections and patterning could be shown by such methods, but comparison of ideas remains the preferable tool, a view that agrees with that of Evans-Pritchard (Evans-Pritchard 1972:100 ff.). This proposal does not imply that many of the same difficulties are avoided by comparative studies; yet such methods yield information not otherwise available, opening up the logic and conceptual universes of both investigated and investigator. At the same time, during comparative studies an alien notion could be attributed to the conceptual system under study. Again in this case, the initial misunderstanding would inevitably control the outcome of the investigation. Only practical events can determine the value of the comparison; only that is open to assessment.

With this observation in mind it is well to note that the present study runs the same risks. At the same time, there has been an attempt, from within the limitations of western ideas, to come to terms with Aboriginal thought. From this perspective, while we cannot positively assert that the analysis is correct, what we can say is that the encounter of Aborigines and whites proceeds as if the findings were correct. It is time, therefore, to consider the practical implications for the continuing encounter.

NOTES

1. Some psychologists have worked with kinship concepts, for instance D. R. Price-Williams and P. M. Greenfield 1977, chaps 10 and 11 respectively.

11

Self-Determination? Self-Management?

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

With this final section we take up a topic set temporarily aside: the practical encounter of Aborigines and whites. We have looked at the past, attempting to explain misunderstandings, and in this review have focused attention on Aboriginal concepts and the world view. We have found two analytical tools of particular value: first a contrast in degrees of abstraction and second, a contrast in the notions of social process. Now we look at the present and the future, shifting attention to the impact of the west on traditional Aboriginal culture and society. In considering this the same two explanatory tools are useful but also important are the social relationships between people.

It is helpful to summarise briefly the immediately relevant elements in Aboriginal and western social functioning (see table 3, below) and to remind ourselves that this process accords with the conceived functioning of the universe (see table 2, chap 10).

From a brief glance at the table below, several points are clear. For one thing the form of relationship and form of social practice are inherently associated. By definition, interaction occurs between kin and friends, but transaction between persons related through business or for professional reasons. In a word, social process is social relationship put into action. Next, the area of overlap between Aboriginal and white practice is obvious, but also the area of contrast. Aborigines find social cohesion through kinship, but Westerners, in a larger society, depend on and require both forms of association, the one kin based and the other open to impersonal negotiation. In traditional society, however, Aborigines have not used the same range of cultural behaviour. For this reason it is not possible to introduce negotiable relationship into Aboriginal society, and with it the transactional process, without some dislocation to that society. As we have seen empirically, such action strikes at the very heart of Aboriginal social practice and authority. This conflict comes about because the western practice reflects concepts that are unknown to traditional Aborigines. They are incompatible with their conceptual system and world view, challenging their understanding of both the social and natural universes. Furthermore, western ideas include second order abstraction and the associated logic, whereas Aboriginal preference is for first order abstraction and logic appropriate to that.

Table 3. Elements in social practice

	Aboriginal	Western
Kin-based elements		
the people	kin, including classificatory kin; adopted 'kin' (e.g. whites)	kin; friends
type of relationship	kin relationship: interactional	kin relationship: interactional
basis of relationship	kinship; accorded kinship	kinship, friendship (accorded kinship)
process	interaction	interaction
authority	kin-based	kin-based; based in friendship
degree of abstraction of the relationship	direct link to reality: first degree	direct link to reality: first degree
Business-based elements		
the people		theoretically anyone but usually non-kin, non-friend
type of relationship/association		business/professional relationship; transactional
basis of relationship		skill; goal; job; quantification significant
process		transaction
authority		as agreed; e.g. based in skill, job
degree of abstraction of the relationship		no direct link with reality: second order

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Self-determination

This is our finding. Yet resulting from policies of self-determination or of self-management, Aborigines are trained to take up business relationships, not with whites only but with other Aborigines, usually in their own communities. In such situations they are expected to assume transactional roles drawn directly from the western conceptual system. Impartiality and second order abstraction is presupposed with the establishment and use of relationship that specifically excludes concrete kin relationships and that often requires the use of quantification. These things are directly contrary to Aboriginal ideas, not merely about kin-based rights and obligations and the functioning of society, but also to ideas about how the universe functions. They challenge an individual's conceived social and cosmic identity and relationships and how he puts these into practice through the process of interaction.

Often no expense and effort are spared by government and non-government agencies, for instance, in educational programmes aimed at 'handing over to Aborigines'. Often real attempts are made to 'hear what the traditional people have to say', as I have tried, but from my observation and findings the policies will lead to the destruction of what is uniquely Aboriginal—that is, the conceptual system, world view and associated social system. It will lead also to significant modification of social practice and process and to the development of an Aboriginal variant on the western system.

To say this is not to pass judgment, neither on Aborigine nor on white. Nevertheless, we can say that firstly, many traditional Aborigines have not realised, and probably still do not realise, the significance to them of some of the choices they make or are urged to make. Secondly, whites may not realise the pressure their policies exert on the traditional individual, on the traditional community, and on many Aborigines less traditionally oriented. Thirdly, it seems that effectively if not by design, through a policy aimed at putting Aborigines into western roles, the western conceptual world and social system are thrust upon them, and thrust upon them fast. Aboriginal self-determination and community development policies work out as swift exercises in intellectual imperialism—assimilation under a different name. The result is that the one choice not offered to an Aborigine is to retain traditional conceptual roots, much of his functional relationships to other people and to the land, and with this his essential, traditional, Aboriginal identity. Effectively, that possibility is refused, but he is offered an alternative: instant community development and some choice in what kind of Westerner he would like to be.

Having said this we must ask, is there an alternative? Since whites are the dominant group and since business relationships and impersonal transaction are accepted, if not worldwide then at least widely, it is inevitable that Aborigines will be drawn into that system, as many of them recognise. There is, it seems, no ultimate choice about this. If we accept that conclusion, the question then becomes, how fast will it happen? One obviously limiting factor is the rate at which the new can be assimilated, the rate at which Aborigines can forge their new Aboriginality, breaking free from the concrete and taking up the more abstract thought necessarily associated with transaction. When that is acceptable, transaction

will not damage or destroy the already existent interactions but will provide an additional, new and productive basis for effective social functioning within Aboriginal society. There is much evidence to show that this rate varies from place to place and from individual to individual.

Administration

It is in this context that the policy of self-determination is being tried and implemented in various ways. One field is that of administration, the administration of Aboriginal communities by Aboriginal councils. The problems and freedoms of Aboriginal representatives have been discussed already, and we found that the notion of representation is itself transactional and that it is a second order abstraction having no direct link with reality. In effect, the idea presupposes that a person of one totem and country can have authority to speak for people of a different totem and country, that is, from an interactional perspective that he/she can assume an identity and functional relationship that concretely is not his/hers. In the case of Aboriginal councils, instead of one or two representatives, we now have a small group, and the same type of difficulties emerge. Various factors contribute to tensions. In the first place, the number of councillors is often determined without reference to the composition of the community, neither the number of family groups nor the seniority of those groups in that country. Next, election to council is by democratic vote so that larger families can have more than one member on the council, but smaller ones may well not have a voice. Again, irrespective of the size of the family group, members of the locally senior family may not choose to stand for election. All of these things influence council composition and, in traditional terms, the council may well not have authority to make decisions either for use of land or on behalf of many people. If funding is to be released, however, councils must assume business relationships and attend to business. Sometimes a group of senior men will advise and a council will specifically seek their wishes on matters relating to land use. Even so, consultation is not always easy, if only because government officials may need answers quickly or because older men are not interested until after some substantial decision has been made.

Many councillors and communities work hard to make the councils effective and much positive work has been achieved, but this is far from easy, often because of the conflict between interactional and transactional authority. Sometimes a council will function but only for as long as the people of local traditional authority permit it to do so, as has happened in several places in the Northern Territory. Sometimes a council becomes unworkable because traditional leaders, community and councillors alike lose confidence in it. Sometimes the community that a council is supposed to represent is not a community at all but a mere aggregation of various groups of Aborigines brought together under pressure from white settlement. All of these things have been noted in Central Australia and all result in council dysfunction. Another possibility is that although a council keeps going, it becomes increasingly alienated from the community. This separation is pronounced if councils are required to function as shire councils under acts of local government, as at Mornington Island in North Queensland.

Understandably, transactional practices could be very attractive to some Aborigines, possibly for the very reason that they pass over traditional authority. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see also that the requirements of western culture and social organisation are destructive of Aboriginal ones. In the long run, a councillor's identity in both social and natural environments is threatened, but no less is the community under pressure. Traditional interactional authority and social organisation are being steadily replaced by others that are not based in kinship, totemic association and land. What then is intended to support and to provide Aborigines with avenues through which to make their own decisions, develop their communities and attain self-management is, at the same time, essentially divisive and socially fragmenting.

The contrast between interactional and transactional social organisation and between alternative notions of authority are the more apparent when we consider the hierarchical possibilities open to transaction. This contrast is seen in the centralised Aboriginal councils organised on a goal-related basis, such as the various land councils and to even greater degree in the pan-Australian organisations, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Such organisations are achieving, or plan to achieve, much that many Aborigines greatly value, but for each level in the hierarchical scheme Aborigines and communities pay a price. On the one hand, they are pushed further from traditional organisation and authority, further from kinship and land-based interaction, and further from totemic ties and the traditional basis of land rights. On the other hand, they are increasingly oriented towards the development of transactional business relationships and western-style social organisation. Needless to say, individuals and communities come under strain, particularly if Aborigines are elected to hold executive authority and are required to speak not only for their own country but for other country as well. This strain is the more acute for the traditionally oriented, concrete thinker who prefers the first order abstractions. In short, through the councils, Aborigines come under the direct influence of western culture and social practice, an influence that increases as the elected bodies have wider and wider geographical jurisdiction and power. In the course of this ongoing process, Aborigines are encouraged by whites into western roles and into conformity with western transactional practice and are steered away from their own culture and social organisation, away from what was uniquely and anciently Aboriginal.

The same conflict arises between traditional and western in other Aboriginal administrative bodies set up by government, such as the incorporated social clubs and Aboriginal housing associations, and through community representation on bodies such as Aboriginal Legal Aid. These organisations have achieved much for Aboriginal people as they themselves are aware, but the same divergences are inherently present: the difference between Aboriginal and western social relationships and conceived social functioning and between the more abstract and the concrete. These various incorporated bodies, like the councils, introduce something new to traditional people, putting the older structures and authority and conceived identity under increasing tension.

In addition to setting up the various administrative bodies, the government has to train Aboriginal workers to carry out the decisions made by these bodies. This training is necessary if Aborigines are to achieve self-determination, and it is the second major thrust of government endeavour. In the Northern Territory the various departments invest

heavily in education, reorganising their structures to give greater authority and responsibility to Aboriginal workers. The underlying assumption seems to be that if Aborigines are trained and given the necessary skills, then the exercise of those skills and the associated authority can only help to strengthen both the individual and the community. Funds are made available, for instance to Aboriginal councils and social clubs, to employ these workers, and they are encouraged to nominate trainees to undertake the relevant courses. This approach is not necessarily disruptive but becomes so when in using their training Aborigines are required to reverse the traditional, either by taking up associations forbidden by tradition or by failing to honour behaviour enjoined among kin. For instance, as we have seen, avoidance relationships cause difficulties for health workers in particular, since the patient and the healer must have direct dealings with each other; similarly, reciprocal rights and obligations cause problems for store workers. Further, the absence of transactional employer-employee relationships in Aboriginal society affects both Aboriginal employers and those employed. This approach to Aboriginal work affects not only adults but also children, for these jobs are the goal towards which much of western education leads the Aboriginal child.

All the difficulties met here have the same basis as those encountered previously: first, the contrast between relationships (some based on kinship but others on business association) and the alternative processes through which these are expressed; and second, the differing notions of authority (the one kin-based, linked to land and ritual standing, and the other residing in skill or job). It is one thing, then, to be trained but another to exercise that skill among kin.

To note these things about self-determination policies and about their implementation and to note the authority given to Aboriginal administrators and the training of workers is not to comment on Aboriginal competence or inherent cognitive ability. Nor are they a comment on Aboriginal goals, for such goals are the concern and responsibility of Aboriginal people themselves. Moreover, let there be no mistake, many things are happening in Central Australia and elsewhere that Aboriginal people want and in which they have an active voice and role to play. There is a need for funding in many fields: many Aborigines want education, want to learn skills, but have previously lacked the opportunity. That disadvantage is now being overcome through courses that are available through government departments and other agencies such as the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. All that is acknowledged, but it does not alter the point being made here that in many ways Aborigines have very difficult decisions to make. In training for jobs and in taking up western roles among their own people, they are required by the job to adopt business relationships and the impartial transactional process. These things all put pressure on kinship, on traditional links with land and totemic species, and on traditional authority, weakening the individual's social and cosmic identity.

Law

Other related attempts are being made in order to assist Aborigines in the effective running of their communities and in their contacts with whites, but the same type of

problem recurs. For instance, the Law Reform Commission was asked to report on Aboriginal customary law with a view to its use by Aboriginal communities in the existing courts and in the punishment and rehabilitation of Aboriginal offenders (*Law Reform Commission Act 1973*). This act assumes that in Aboriginal societies there is an objective and impartial system of law enforcement. Since in non-sacred affairs support of relatives is the primary interactional social obligation, impartial justice is not actually possible in particular instances. At the same time, offences are recognised as offences and a general standard of law and order is maintained. Understandably, the Commission has encountered difficulty. Some ideas submitted by Aboriginal people depend on the authority of the councils. These proposals are attempts by individual communities to retain some control, yet to come to terms with white legal requirements. Nevertheless, the kin relationship of individual councillors and accused can be critical, as also the general composition of the council and the basis of its election. None can doubt that the whole issue of law and order is a difficult one, for strict objectivity puts the traditional under strain. In addition, western law and western notions of what constitutes an offence are often inadequate when dealing with traditional people and traditional communities.

In another move, a treaty has been proposed between Aborigines and whites. This notion has received considerable support from some Westerners and from a number of Aborigines, presumably on the grounds that it is something that whites would respect. Nonetheless, many traditional Aborigines have not been interested, for instance those in Arnhem Land and Central Australia, and many discussions about it have been held with them. The treaty concept is difficult because it introduces transactional notions and presupposes generality. By contrast, land rights are negotiated on the grounds of concrete specificities, the association of known individuals with known sites. Understandably the question of representation arises, for who could negotiate a treaty? And on whose behalf? Could such a formal document have any traditional, concrete validity? Who could sign? Indeed, no matter what the content, signing would constitute a white intellectual victory and an Aboriginal defeat, for it could only be meaningful if Aborigines abandoned their own concepts and used western ideas. This problem is real, and as a result some hold that a unilateral statement by whites would be preferable.

Technology

In the course of development, traditional Aborigines are being swamped not only by the white man's conceptual system and social system, but also by western technology and, therefore, by Westerners themselves. This domination comes about when communities undertake projects that require, or at any rate result in, the purchase of machinery that Aborigines cannot yet service, such as road-making equipment and large electrical power plants. This type of thing is the result of Aboriginal development programmes that tend to exert a self-propagating influence. With the power plant in place, increased use of electricity becomes possible—in the store, in people's homes, in the streets which are now lit. As a result, a Central Australian community that has a smaller Aboriginal population than it did over thirty years ago (due to outstation movements) now has three times the

number of white staff: one person in four in that community. The point raised here is specifically not that of material progress—that has occurred and is welcomed by many—but the result has been increased and increasing dominance by white experts. This process has resulted in the growth of what is known as the 'Aboriginal industry', a growth greatly increased through the numerous bureaucratic departments and agencies that are involved with the various projects and, again, through the legal, medical and other professional assistance offered to communities.

Agriculture

As this discussion shows, community development programmes are profoundly significant not only for Aboriginal practice but, more importantly, for traditional thought. In this context it is interesting to consider the impact of another 'programme', namely that of agriculture. This raises a point that has long puzzled anthropologists and others. Traditionally Aborigines did not cultivate the soil, but why not, when at least in the north they knew something about it? These coastal people had seen it through the visits of Maccassan agriculturalists and through contacts with Torres Strait Islanders. Moreover, yams that were suitable for such a purpose were indigenous to the area. Why, then, did Aborigines practise nothing more than incipient agriculture?

Following a review of the subject, Flood advances the view that in all probability there was no necessity for cultivation, that in the north, hunting and foraging provided the people with sufficient food so that they lived in affluence without the need to work the soil. Moreover, if agriculture was rejected in the north, that would explain why the idea did not penetrate the continent and why further south the practice was unknown (Flood 1983:219 ff.). While this suggestion no doubt identifies a significant and contributory factor, there is more to it, for the conceptual system and world view are also important.

From the perspective of Aboriginal totemism (chap. 3), human beings and nature are at one with each other. The association is patterned according to kinship, and so particular people are associated with particular parts of nature and with particular land. All the relationships are immutable, not open to negotiation, and are interactional in type. As Westerners conceive it, people are not at one with nature but over against it, and relationship to land is that of owner and owned. Questions of money and goal are important and the association, which is open to negotiation, can be described as transactional. If Aborigines were to adopt agriculture, these issues would become relevant. The people would have to prepare the land and would have to plant what to them are totemic species to produce more of their kind. As soon as these two things were done, the western notion of production would not be far away and the question of ownership, both of land and yield, would become relevant. The hunter-gatherer's conceived spiritual relationship to species and to land would be under challenge from the producer's ideas. We can expect, therefore, that cultivation might be resisted because it conflicts with the world view.

What is certainly so is that agriculture is still rare among Aborigines. Many whites have taken the view that this 'omission' can be remedied by training (see, for instance, H. C. Coombes 1978:210-21), but there is more to it, as the above discussion suggests.

Moreover, from the practical perspective a number of points can be made. Over the years, both on mission and government settlements, strenuous efforts have been made to interest Aborigines in growing vegetables and fruit. Some have worked in gardens for years and schools regularly run gardening projects, but commonly, when there is no supervision, the gardens disappear. Sometimes for a short time, for a year or more, someone shows an interest and takes the initiative to grow and tend a crop, as has happened at Ernabella and at outstations. But usually the projects lapse, perhaps to start for a while again later. This seeming lack of interest is understandable for practical reasons. For one thing, most Aborigines still have no social means to handle surplus. As we have seen, the traditional right and obligation makes distribution mandatory until all is gone. To see this one has only to consider the use of social security payments and wages which are distributed to benefit all who are traditionally entitled to a share. Again, another disincentive is apparent when we observe the foraging habits permitted in Aboriginal children. Both customs work against the establishment of personal ownership. Further, Aborigines in Central Australia are still active in ceremonial life which requires mobility, so that the crop goes unwatered. It is not hard, therefore, to understand some of the practical problems that would be faced by potential agriculturalists. Moreover, as in earlier years, an alternative supply of food is available today without all the work that agriculture entails. For one thing, many Aborigines still hunt, many receive wages and, if not, then social security benefits. We can say, then, that both of these—the interactional world view with the associated social practice, and the habit of getting enough for the day but not a surplus—work against the establishment of agriculture.

The inappropriateness of agriculture for Aboriginal thought and lifestyle raises again the question of quantification. Seagrim and Lendon suggest that historically it probably arose in connection with private ownership and the resultant question, 'Have I as much as you?' (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:201). While there can be no certainty, it is likely that initially survival was more significant. It would be necessary to assess whether a given amount planted would produce an adequate yield and who would benefit—and who would inherit. If this idea is accepted, then people who are hunters and gatherers, especially affluent ones, are unlikely to develop quantification and the various ways of using it, such as in assigning quantity and weight and other physical properties of matter in use by Westerners.

Maybe the agricultural revolution helped to establish the transactional relationship between people, as also between people and species, people and land, and with this helped to introduce quantification. If that is so, maybe the economic and social revolution introduced a need for more abstract concepts but in so doing initiated a contrast with the earlier concrete and interactional conceptual world. While that is conjecture, today, in respect of agriculture, Aborigines have a choice. They have a chance to say 'No' and, in fact, take the opportunity. By so doing, in effect if not by design, they avoid the possibility of straining the traditional relationship to people, species and land; yet at the same time food continues to be available. It is this that probably makes the negative response possible, but it is nonetheless interesting that Aborigines continue to exercise that option in what appears to be an act of self-determination.

Education

In respect of other preferences, it is not as easy for Aborigines to reject western ideas, such as in the field of education. In that area Aborigines experience difficulties of the same type as those described above. Western ideas about education appear to rest on a number of formal assumptions, not all of which are explicit, not all of which are correct. One has been noted above: the idea that skill-based transactional authority is congenial to Aboriginal culture and society. There are other misconceptions. In the first place, the western approach to teaching is often formal. By contrast, in the concrete Aboriginal way, people learn on the job; their training comes in the context of the real-life situation. They are not, therefore, practising in order to be able to transfer what is learned to some other place or circumstance. Instead, sometimes more, sometimes less satisfactorily, they are doing something now that concretely needs doing. By contrast, whites approach teaching from a formal perspective. Often they arrange courses particularly designed for Aboriginal students and conduct them at some central point to which trainees are brought. A formal, artificial situation is created, no matter what the content of the teaching may be; yet students come with a concrete idea of the occasion. Moreover, senior members of the community, who use the same concrete thought and logic and who may well have chosen the trainees, do not see what is happening and are alienated from the work from the start. After a while the 'initiated' return to their communities, the occasion over, but they may well not deploy their new skill, choosing instead to become particularly active in Aboriginal affairs, stressing their true identity. While this last practice is less common than it was, the basic problem remains. To overcome it Aboriginal people ask whites to bring training sessions into the individual communities. Whites, however, continue to miss the point and, at best, propose some kind of local or regionalised training sessions and funds for students, maintaining a formal attitude to teaching and learning.

By contrast, as discussion with them makes explicit, Aborigines are asking that they be appointed to real jobs, as workers. They do not take up the notion of 'student' or 'trainee' or of 'practising', all of them abstractions of the second degree, but ask instead that the novices be paid wages and be trained in the skill by actively working. In this way necessary work is done where everyone can see, the individual is built into the job from the start and the positive evidence of work is there to be seen. In short, traditional Aborigines recognise that skills have to be developed. They see this as occurring in a real, as distinct from a 'mock up', situation. The novice actually works within the community on a job that concretely needs to be done and, by so doing, gains some authority in that job. In the past this view of training and learning has made it difficult to transfer skills from the classroom to the community.

The point at issue here is the difference between Aboriginal and western notions, that is, the difference between abstractions of the first and second order. The contrast is present in the concepts of teaching and learning, including what constitutes a teaching and learning situation. It is present also in the idea of how authority is acquired, a notion that, in turn, affects the delivery or application of a skill. At the same time difficulties for white educators are obvious. If everyone were to be trained on the job as some are now, logistical and financial burdens could well be considerable.

Further difficulties in education arise because whites often act as though the teacher's aim is to fill a gap in traditional Aboriginal understanding. When they encounter difficulty, they redouble their teaching efforts and sometimes conclude that Aborigines lack ability. As with any individual, that could be the case, but often the teachers themselves are the ones who are slow to learn. When an Aborigine shows particular difficulty in learning, whites usually do not consider the possibility that the student's mind might be filled already with something else, with a functioning, culturally acceptable alternative. Teachers do not seem to consider the possibility that they might be trying to pour oil into a container already full of water. In other words, if certain western notions are to be introduced, then there is a cost to the Aboriginal person, for the traditional must first be displaced. Such problems may well arise because the western and Aboriginal conceptual systems, as systems, are not coextensive. We can expect resistance from Aborigines, therefore, if attempts are made to introduce into the interactional world features fundamental to transaction, for instance quantification and business relationships (Bain 1979:290). Seagrim and Lendon have noted one segment, the resistance to number shown by Aboriginal school children, and predict that it will be successfully taught in the schools only at the cost of damaging Aboriginal culture.[1] (Seagrim & Lendon 1980:212)

Aboriginal-white misunderstandings

Lastly, whites are too ready to identify lack of ambition among traditional Aborigines, a reported apathy towards 'development'. While there may be some validity in this view in particular circumstances, we can well ponder what constitutes development and in whose eyes. Moreover, it is necessary to consider the influence of first degree abstractions and the concrete approach to the future. When that future is grounded in one's own past and present experience, merely seeing something done by someone else in some other place does not necessarily fire ambition. It is needful that a link be established, as is done when a new corroboree is brought by people of authority from elsewhere. When that happens the ritual is established locally by local performance accompanied by a specific invitation to join in.

Meantime, whites continue to pursue their policies and educational objectives. Understandably, misunderstanding results and, from a position of good will, both Aborigines and whites come under strain. The Aboriginal notions, as notions, bear no less heavily on whites than the white ideas do on Aborigines. However, individual whites can usually, in one way or another, distance themselves from events. Many Aborigines do from time to time 'go bush', but since whites form the dominant group, there is no ultimate 'escape' for the Aboriginal person. Small wonder, then, that in the midst of 'self-determination' and 'self-management' we see signs of strain and social breakdown in Aboriginal individuals and communities. Alcoholism is common, petrol sniffing among children is epidemic, vandalism is on the increase. Part of the whites' response has been an attempt to 'give back authority to the old men' and at the same time to redouble efforts to get Aborigines into western roles, a response that points up the inherent difficulty that, instead of being addressed, is rather rendered the more acute.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Respect for Aboriginal concepts and customs

If this analysis is correct, then probably the most significant and productive thing that whites can do is to respect traditional culture instead of merely giving it lip service. They can respect traditional relationships and their significance in social practice by working in such a way that Aborigines can retain these things at a functional level for as long as they want to do so. In other words, if Aborigines want to slow down the dash into the western world, if they want more time, then that is their right. This way of working would give traditional people the opportunity to make choices that are not open to them now, due to the rigidity of western plans. They would have a voice, not merely in the things of material progress as they do to some extent now, but also in the deeper cultural and social issues that affect them. It is in these more significant areas that currently Aborigines have little if any choice and in respect of which they are forcibly assimilated into white society.

Flexibility in administration and employment

A number of possible steps have either been noted explicitly or hinted at in the foregoing, all of which could help to give flexibility to present western policies. For one thing, the existing traditional social system and authority can be respected if whites stop expecting Aborigines to act impartially, setting aside the traditional structures of kinship and links to land. At the same time new ways can be found to express those traditional patterns; for instance, government departments could alter a number of features of Aboriginal councils. They could alter the method of voting for council membership and they could retain flexibility in council composition and length of term. All of this could be modified and adapted in consultation with Aborigines so that they better suit the various local interactional requirements. This could be done, with traditional links to land, totem and people retained and traditional authority respected, yet administrative goals achieved. During the latter half of 1984, two Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory had a chance to think along these lines, and at Aputula such ideas were current from the start of the council in the late 1960s (chap. 5).

Adjustments can also be made in employment practices. If a job requires a skilled worker in a western role, one for which impartiality is needed, then two or more Aborigines can be appointed on a part-time basis. In the early 1980s when the Northern Territory Department of Health decided to give more training and authority to Aboriginal workers and to reduce the number of trained nurses on remote communities, some well trained and senior Aboriginal health workers resigned. However, when health workers were able to work in a small team or in pairs, perhaps a senior and a junior from opposing moieties, then many difficulties were overcome. In this way every member of a community continued to receive health care. If there was an avoidance relationship between a patient and one worker, then another could treat the case. While some logistical and financial problems

result from such arrangements, the transactional strain is reduced for both individual and community and traditional identity is retained.

Again as we have seen, Aborigines having lesser seniority (at least locally) are sometimes more acceptable in western-type occupations, perhaps because they can be disciplined easily by people of local authority. In this regard it has been noted in the Northern Territory and Queensland that the people who learn the western skills and hold the western-type jobs are often not of the locally senior patrilines, or they are not initiated, or they may be women.

In all of this there is no suggestion that Aborigines refrain from learning western skills and from developing ability in western-type occupations. On the contrary, the way is open for such work. Accent instead is on ways and means to accommodate interactional process, reducing the impact of transaction in the delivery of those skills and on the decision-making process.

Temporary use of a backstop

Sometimes the use of a non-kin 'boss' is useful (chap. 9). Such a person need stay no longer than required by a community, but during his/her stay can facilitate or act as a kind of 'gears' so that two different social systems can operate side by side. As a result, Aborigines can reach the practical objectives that they have identified, but at the same time kinship obligations and identity can be retained. To put whites into this type of job runs counter to prevailing policies of aboriginalisation and self-determination and, moreover, in some places Aborigines themselves may want to take up transactional responsibility and authority. One disadvantage of using a white is the control that such a person could exert. Nevertheless, he or she can make it possible for Aboriginal people to develop skills and to use their abilities, but at the same time to avoid the collision between interaction and transaction and the tension between first and second order abstraction. Such a person, moreover, would probably exert no more influence, if as much, than the army of professionals, technical experts and bureaucrats who currently work with Aboriginal people.

Alternative technology

Another possibility, tried in some places in Central Australia, is the use of alternative technology. If this is done, many Aborigines of traditional authority but little if any western education can be brought into the work force. This approach eliminates the conflict between the traditionally based and the western type of authority and at the same time gets Aborigines into jobs instead of white people. As we have seen, this approach enabled Aputula men to build their own modular houses, needing only one supervisor and mechanic for the whole town and, from time to time, the assistance of a tradesman plumber and electrician. But there were other gains: maintenance was not a problem and, moreover, by taking action and responsibility themselves, Aborigines built their own standing relative to that of whites and retained their own traditional identity.

Culturally sensitive education

Lastly, whites should be able to modify their approach to teaching in order to take Aboriginal ideas into account. We have already suggested the use of on-site training in actual employment in the home community. Our discussion of 'learning, teaching and knowing' in chapter 6 suggests other ideas and practices as does the discussion of education in this chapter. In addition, much innovative work has been undertaken in some remote schools, for instance by Harris and Christie (Harris 1984; Christie 1985; Christie, Harris & McClay 1987).

CONCLUSION

In short, the proposals given above affect mainly the speed of change, but it is this that may well be critical, giving new ideas the opportunity to take root. There is considerable reason, as many Aborigines recognise, to 'hasten slowly'. To attempt to go too fast may well result in the breakdown of the old long before the new is a functional and conceptual possibility. Nonetheless, what to choose and when to make the critical changes from kin relationships to business relationships and from interaction to transaction are difficult decisions, decisions that only Aborigines can take.

NOTES

1. Compare S. H. Irvine's account of the Shona of Central Africa. He notes that African and western ideologies, and particularly systems of causality, are mutually exclusive, and that if the western is to be accepted then the traditional must be inhibited (Irvine 1969:231).

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